

Science Fantasy

No. 11

VOLUME 4

2/-



In the next issue

It should have been a very ordinary journey from Holborn to Hounslow, but somewhere West of Piccadilly the train entered another dimension—one where the Allies had lost World War II. That wasn't all either . . .

THE WRONG TRACK

By George Whitley

Illustrated by QUINN

You will have heard, no doubt, of the "Circle of the Globe." It sounds like the title of something by the late Mr. Gilbert Keith Chesterton—but it's not, although it might, quite possibly, have appealed to him. The "Globe" is a pub in Hatton Garden. There, every Thursday night, all those living or visiting London and in any way connected with fantasy and science fiction gather to drink and talk shop

an intriguing novelette

AND

★ TEMPLE
★ DEWEY
★ TUBB
★ GARDENER
★ ALDISS

Science Fantasy

Vol. 4 No. 11

1954

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Well-known writer William F. Temple whose most popular book The Four Sided Triangle was made into a film last year has always been outspoken in the cause of literary standards. His editorial below is one that most editors would do well to study—because he is so right !

STANDARD STYLE

By WILLIAM F. TEMPLE

My wife has left the current *Woman's Own* on my chair. I open it at a story and find I'm reading this:

"He stroked the bridge of his nose.

"He said, carefully: 'This is a small town, Alex. Everyone knows everyone else . . .'

"I said: 'You don't trust me, do you?'

"'You're a city man, Alex,' he said quietly. 'It's just a good story to you . . .'

"I felt too tired to argue. I even felt he might be right, and I'd been fighting that feeling for over a year.

"I said: 'There it is, Mr. Haggar.'

"He turned and went slowly across to the door.

"He said, quietly: . . ."

Well, what is unusual about it? Nothing. That is the trouble. Nothing. It is the modern Standard Style. Mostly it pervades the magazines, but it has slopped over into novels, from the cheap paperbacks about thugs and private eyes to the higher stratum of Nigel Balchin.

Its grip on the science-fiction magazines is strong. One science-fiction magazine reads very much like another these days. That is because the editors like Standard Style. They think it is slick, professional, crisp, efficient. Conscious of their limited space, they want concentrated writing, stuff with punch in it—nothing sprawling, diffuse, or airy-fairy. They are right in wanting these things. But does Standard Style supply it?

It is supposed to be an economical style, yet it is stuffed with repetition. It is supposed to be actionful, yet its action is mostly trivial, contributing nothing towards the forward movement of the story. The arrangement is as standard as a form of application for a dog licence, snippet of dialogue alternating with snippet of so-called action :

“He said, coolly . . .
I gave myself a cigarette.
I said, carefully . . .
He rubbed a watery eye.
He said, quietly . . .”

It is as mechanical as the typewriter on which usually it is directly written. “Carefully” and “quietly” are the greatest favourites for describing manners of speech, though Balchin has a partiality for “irritably,” probably because many of his characters are neurotic types acting out a nerve storm.

The irrelevant trivia of the actions often concern lighting or stubbing out cigarettes. Maybe the characters get so breathless through excessive smoking that they are able to converse only in gasping jerks, and even only occasional flowing periods and purple patches are out. More likely it is because editors feel present-day readers prefer sentences chopped into small pieces for the same reason parents chop up food for their small children.

This magazine is all right for the thick-ear stuff. It fits. Gangsters have a limited vocabulary, environment, and outlook. It will even do for those yarns concerning fights between pressure groups, tycoons and government officials preceding interplanetary flight, which some people call science-fiction and I do not. But it is not at all right for science-fiction proper. Science fiction proper is romance about the unknown. It should convey some sense of that romance. It should be rich in wonder, in imagery, in atmosphere.

Here is a fragment from Doyle's *The Lost World* :

"How shall I ever forget the solemn mystery of it? The height of the trees and the thickness of the boles exceeded anything which I in my town-bred life could have imagined, shooting upwards in magnificent columns until, at an enormous distance above our heads, we could dimly discern the spot where they threw out their side-branches into Gothic upward curves which coalesced to form one great matted roof of verdure, through which only an occasional golden ray of sunshine shot downwards to trace a thin dazzling line of light amidst the majestic obscurity. As we walked noiselessly amid the thick, soft carpet of decaying vegetation the hush fell upon our souls which comes upon us in the twilight of the Abbey, and even Professor Challenger's full-chested notes sank into a whisper . . ."

A mere snippet from Wells' *The Country of the Blind* :

"Then came the stupendous outbreak of Mindobamba, when it was night in Quito for seventeen days, and the water was boiling at Yaguachi and all the fish floated dying even as far as Guayaquil; everywhere along the Pacific slopes there were landslips and swift thawings and sudden floods, and one whole side of the old Arauca crest slipped and came down in thunder and cut off the Country of the Blind for ever from the exploring feet of men."

From Kipling's *A Matter of Fact* :

"The sun was clear, there was no wind, and we watched, the whole crew, stokers and all, in wonder and pity, but chiefly pity. The Thing was so helpless, and, save for his mate, so alone. No human eye should have beheld him; it was monstrous and indecent to exhibit him there in trade waters between atlas degrees of latitude. He had been spewed up, mangled and dying, from his rest on the sea-floor, where he might have lived till the Judgment Day, and we saw the tides of life go from him as an angry tide goes out across rocks in the teeth of a landward gale. At last the battle for life ended, in a batter of coloured seas . . ."

There is body, atmosphere, even the crude elements of poetry in that sort of writing. Wells' stories in particular are packed with it. You can re-read him with pleasure. The ubiquitous, flat Standard style is a poor exchange for it—brittle, meatless stuff, providing no nourishment for the imagination.

In the *Strand Magazine*, before it adopted Standard Style and died, Doyle wrote like Doyle, Wells like Wells, Kipling like Kipling. They didn't all write exactly like each other. Yet a future historian examining the magazines of today could well believe that 90% of the stories in them were written by the same author—a super-Dumas—under scores of pen-names. There are some exceptions in the work of

Theodore Sturgeon, Ray Bradbury, Arthur C. Clarke, John Wyndham, and one or two others.

The freshest and richest food for the imagination is nowadays to be found between the hard covers of science-fiction books—and I don't mean those which are merely unretouched reprints of magazine serials: I mean science-fiction which the author has been allowed to write in his own style. He should be given more freedom to do so in the magazines. So long as editors regard Standard Style as the criterion, authors are tethered so like so many goats. For authors must supply what editors want. Only those with patrons, pensions, or patience unlimited can afford to do otherwise.

In a recent brave Editorial John Carnell has indicated a falling away in the readership of science-fiction. My view is that the monotonous sameness of the presentation of it is probably the main cause. True science-fiction is exciting. But porridge for every meal is boring. A well mixed salad is much more inviting. Then why not try to supply it?

If the authors cannot be given their heads, then at least they should be given more rope.

Buffon said: "The style is the man himself." Then allow authors to be more like themselves. At the moment they seem doomed to have to wear the same uniform of Standard Style. It has a certain smartness, the buttons have high gloss. But the colour is drab—and it *is* a uniform. Off with it, and off with the common deadpan mask that goes with it. Let us hear from the man himself.

If individual style is given a chance to creep back into magazine science-fiction, the odds are that the old black magic will creep back with it. And suddenly one day we may find we are reading about living and breathing characters adventuring in ever-fresh wonderlands. As sometimes it used to be, and as it always should be.

—William F. Temple.



Immortality would be a fascinating if highly dangerous gift to Mankind, assuming that it arrived suddenly and not as a slow natural process. Assume then that if your I.Q. is over 88 you could live for ever—if not you would remain mortal !

LIVE FOR EVER

By J. T. McINTOSH

Illustrated by QUINN

The world didn't have a chance to decide whether it was ready for immortality or not. Suddenly there it was—not take it or leave it, just take it.

People had looked for the secret of life eternal before, and never found it. That was natural, since they had never looked in quite the right place. It wasn't to be found in the realms of chemistry, or medicine, or physics, or mathematics, or psychology, though there was a little of all of these in it. Most of it came within the bounds of common sense.

The first, the classic statement of the process—the one attributed to Gregory Renfield—wasn't the only one, but it was as good as any. All the others came from it; nothing that really mattered was ever added, and nothing much could be taken away.

Reading the Renfield statement, the average man or woman was first sceptical, then interested, then excited. There were certain assumptions in the statement, assumptions which couldn't immediately

be proved true or false. There were propositions which seemed to make sense, but which could contain flaws. There was admittedly a knack in applying most of the instructions which didn't come at once; practice, at least, was obviously required. Full comprehension rarely came in one blinding flash. It came in little sparks and twinklings and glimmers, lighting not the way before, but the way behind.

Nevertheless, anyone reading the statement who was reasonably intelligent, open to persuasion, able to follow an argument and not without imagination, would gradually come to the conclusion "*If all this is true—why, barring accidents, no one need ever die !*"

That was why it was so quickly, so immediately, so widely published. One might have thought that most of the newspapers which received a copy of the statement would have consigned it to the wastepaper basket or run an ironical, humorous article on this wild and incredulous idea that immortality was merely a matter of modifying one's ideas on life and death, on eating, sleeping, what one could control in one's body and what one couldn't, on tiredness, on physical decline—and then learning a few tricks of bodily control which led on to other tricks which enabled one to stop decay or even reverse the process if necessary.

However, the newspapers didn't treat the statement as they would have treated some new prediction of the end of the world, say. For in every newspaper office, as routine, someone was told to read the statement just in case there was anything in it, and the someone, generally not devoid of imagination and intelligence, saw the implications and passed it to someone else who passed it to the editor who rang up the owners. And in almost every case the answer was the same. The statement might be an amazingly clever hoax (no one could find out anything about Gregory Renfield), but it had to be printed. If it was true, it wasn't worth while printing any other news. Even if it was false, it was the story of the year.

So all the newspapers printed the statement verbatim, with or without comment. And the next day millions of people, not knowing at first what they were doing, started on the short, easy, almost involuntary process of becoming immortal.

That was how Gregory Renfield had insisted, wearily but inflexibly, that it should be.

"Damn it all, Greg," exclaimed Fred Fanstone, "we've got to know more about this thing before we throw it out like that—there you are, live for ever whether you like it or not !"

Renfield shook his head. "It's come just a little too late for me," he had said. "I'm going to die anyway. I haven't time to do any-

thing except throw the process wide open to everybody, and that's what I'm going to do, Fred. It's the only thing to do with a discovery like this."

He had to rest before he could go on, fighting for breath. The woman at the bottom of the bed didn't move, but her fists went white as she clenched them. Even Mercia couldn't stifle all sign of emotion, though not much ever showed if she didn't want it to show. After all, she had been married to Renfield for fifteen years.

"It's not that I don't trust you and Mercia to handle this right, Fred," said Renfield at last. "As I see it this has to be a free gift to everybody, all together, at once. You know I believe it's been discovered before, or partly discovered. I think there have been people in history who were immortal or nearly immortal, refusing or unable to pass on how they did it, what they knew."

Fred nodded jerkily. He was a tall, restless man who always seemed to be on the verge of exploding. He was utterly out of place in a sick-room. He was incapable of anything resembling the conventional bedside manner.

"There may even," said Renfield, "be some of them alive today, manipulating ordinary mortals for some reason of their own, fulfilling some scheme—"

Fred shook his head impatiently.

"Well, never mind that," said Renfield, not prepared to argue. "I know how it sounds—like early Boris Karloff. But anyway, Fred, I want the whole thing so widely known that there can't be any chance of individuals or groups or nations using it to acquire money or power. If there are snags, let everybody work them out together. I hope I'll still be around to see how they do it."

He wasn't. That was almost the last thing he said.

Fred, after he died, might have gone against Renfield's wishes if Mercia had agreed with him. But Mercia tranquilly, placidly, insisted that Gregory's way was right.

"I know I didn't love him as I should," she admitted. "It wasn't my fault, or his either. Temperamentally and physically we were all wrong for each other. Mentally, though, we were always together, Fred. I think Greg's right. I nearly always did, through the whole fifteen years we were together."

Fred moved clumsily, urged to protect and comfort her by tangled motives which he hadn't investigated. She evaded him neatly.

"I like you, Fred," she said calmly, "but for a while I'm going to like you from a distance, if you don't mind—whether you mind or not, in fact. But we have something to do together first."

The something was sending out the statement to every important newspaper in the world, timed to arrive on the same day, precisely as Renfield had meant to do it himself.

The day it was printed he had been three weeks in his grave.

Sam Fortin killed for it.

The millions of copies that were printed were snapped up everywhere. Even normal people bought half a dozen newspapers. Anxious, neurotic people bought scores of copies, in case of accident. Newspaper offices ran out of newsprint, running off ten, twenty, fifty times as many copies as usual.

The world naturally went crazy when such a large-sized spanner was thrown in the works, and the first sign of it was what happened to those newspapers. People papered walls with them, framed them, sent them to friends who had twenty copies already, copied every word out in notebooks, burned them, showered the streets with them, made paper hats out of them, hid them under the floorboards, lined drawers with them. Everybody who could read went over the process twenty times and explained it to everyone else who would listen.

Everybody wondered how such a thing could be so obvious and yet so unknown until then. Scores of people said they had been thinking along those lines for years and very soon would have seen the whole thing for themselves. Quite a few declared that they had only had to read the statement once and it all was clear.

But they had their dozen copies at home all the same, to be quite sure.

Sam just happened to be unlucky. He didn't come into town until evening, and when he asked what the matter was he was told that nobody needed to die any more; it was in all the papers; the whole thing was down in black and white; it was no hoax; everyone could see it for himself; it was gospel truth; everybody said so.

And Sam couldn't get a paper.

Considering the hundreds of thousands of copies that were in existence in the city, he must have been very unlucky indeed that no one would even lend him one. But then, there was a shade more than bad luck behind it. The people he went to knew him. Perhaps they didn't think that Sam should be preserved for ever.

They could have been right.

Presently it became clear to Sam, breathless, impatient and desperate after his fruitless hunt round the town, that the men and women who smiled apologetically and said they didn't happen to have a paper were lying.

None of them could seriously have thought Sam would never see the statement. They just didn't want to be a party to making Sam immortal, that was all. There were quite a few Sams, quite a few people who weren't helped in any way. They weren't hindered, they just weren't helped. In his travels Sam met another of these people, Dave Connell.

"Im-mor-tal-ity?" said Dave blankly. "What's that?"

"Everybody's talking about it, dope!" Sam told him. "You must know—"

"Nobody calls me a dope!" shouted Connell, raising his fist.

Sam calmed him down and left him. Connell didn't know; he didn't have the brains to know. Even if someone took the trouble to explain patiently to Connell what it was all about, it would take him a long time to see it. Apparently no one had.

Forgetting Connell, Sam continued his search, a mad rage slowly boiling up in him at the thought of all these people smiling, laughing because they had the secret and Sam Fortin hadn't.

Sam was given to made rages. The next time he saw that apologetic smile—on Mike Griffin's face this time—he didn't wait for the bland refusal that was coming. He struck savagely with the heel of his hand, his knee and his right foot. He kicked and kicked at Mike Griffin as he twitched on the floor until Griffin ceased twitching and lay still, until bones cracked, until even through his boots and his red fury Sam could feel that Griffin was dead.

There was a folded sheet torn from a newspaper in Griffin's pocket. It was soaked in blood, but Sam could just make it out.

He read it and began to learn how to live for ever.

"No," said Ramona quietly but firmly. "It's not settled yet whether immortals can have children or not. Let's wait, Jack."

"But suppose—"

"I'm twenty and you're twenty-four. Neither of us is going to die of old age before we've had a couple of kids."

"We could get sick," said Jack. "They say immortals don't get sick. Anyway, what harm would it do to read the thing again?"

"It seems that once you understand it," said Ramona patiently, "you can't help being immortal. You just *are*. There's no going back. If immortals can't have children, and nobody knows yet, you've lost your chance for ever."

"But . . ." said Jack again.

A psychologist would have seen that he was objecting because he had to object, that the arguments he brought up were merely justifications of what he wanted to do.

"And listen, Jack," said Ramona, calm but determined, "if you go off on your own and become an immortal, you and I are through, understand?"

"You're being completely unreasonable," said Jack hotly.

"Maybe. But I want children. If this thing had come along later, when we were married and had a family, I probably wouldn't have had a thing against it. But I'm not going to let it stop me having a son and maybe a daughter. And it needn't."

"Suppose," said Jack, casting around wildly for something that would make it all right for Ramona and him to become immortal at once, "suppose it doesn't happen to us? Some people can't do it. I want to know now."

"If we don't have the brains to become immortal," said Ramona easily, "it doesn't matter much when we try and fail. But we needn't worry, Jack. We're not dumb. Please," she added, as Jack started to speak again, "don't let's go all over it again. I've never been stubborn over anything else, but this time, I know I'm right. My way, we've nothing to lose and everything to gain."

Jack shut his mouth obstinately. There was a line of worry, of uncertainty, in his forehead. He had to know.

He *had* to know.

"Try again, Andrew," said Ruth MacDonald desperately. "Just once more. Please. For me."

Ruth was fifty and had seventy-four million dollars, a figure that was almost worth the twenty thousand she spent every year to keep it, and an eighteen-year-old son who wasn't very bright. She was single at the moment. Her love for five husbands hadn't lasted, but through all her marriages she had loved Andrew with a deep, passionate love that passed the understanding of all her husbands.

"Please, Andrew," she implored.

"Oh, all right," he said sulkily. He looked at the paper again, and Ruth read slowly along with him.

It wasn't immortality for all, it was now clear. The statement had to be understood. It turned out that people of I.Q. 88 or over could generally understand it, and people under that generally couldn't. There were exceptions, of course; some psychotics with quite high I.Q.'s couldn't, or wouldn't, see it.

Andrew MacDonald had a mother who loved him and would have given him anything, but her seventy-four million dollars couldn't give him an I.Q. of 88 or over.

Ruth was immortal already—it wasn't her fault that Andrew wasn't intelligent. She had seen at once what the statement meant.

It was so beautifully logical that when one fully understood it and could apply it and had learned all the little mental and physical tricks that had to be learned, one *knew* one had conquered death. After years of fighting desperately to retain the semblance of youth, Ruth *knew* she need fight no more and that she was growing easily and serenely back towards it.

However, where Andrew was concerned Ruth was completely unselfish. The knowledge that she was immortal gave her no pleasure, not while Andrew . . .

He tore the paper suddenly, savagely. "I want to go out in the garden," he said.

Ruth realised the truth, that he just didn't understand life and death, let alone the more complex idea of immortality. She immediately suppressed the thought.

"Just once more," she pleaded. "Then you can go out."

She produced another copy of the statement. They began to read it for the four hundred sixty-third time.

The governments of the world couldn't just pretend it hadn't happened. They had to take some notice, do something.

Fairlee was set up in Nebraska as a test village. There were immortals there, non-immortals who were so because they hadn't read the Renfield statement and non-immortals who were so because they couldn't understand it. There were people young and old, married and single, clever and stupid.

The village was isolated. Visitors were discouraged. Everything that happened there was carefully noted, graphed and tabulated.

But for the moment all that was emerging was that immortals were exactly like everybody else except that (a) they believed they were going to live for ever, (b) they seemed immune to infection. Minor injuries were sustained and healed precisely as usual.

It was the scientific approach which produced the phrasing of (a). Immortals *knew* they were going to live for ever. But a scientist, even an "immortal," wouldn't accept his "knowledge" as proof. He insisted on the quotes. Proof that immortals were immortals would only come when they lived for ever. Meantime immortality was a mere theory waiting for proof.

The world would have to wait a long time for that proof.

"I get it," said Connell suddenly. "You mean if you know all this, you don't never have to die?"

Miz Bentley sighed triumphantly, at peace with the world. It was a big moment. Miz hadn't spent all the time he had spent trying to get the idea over to Connell because he liked Connell, or thought

Connell ought to know what was going on, or from any similar motive. Miz had been talking to Connell because people said he wasn't smart enough to get Connell to understand what immortality was. And Miz had to show he was.

"You got it clear now?" he asked.

"Sure, why didn't someone say so before?"

Miz had said so before, often. "Okay, Dave," he said, getting up. "Next time you see Al or Jim, you tell them I told you."

Left alone, Connell pondered. It was a ponderous business for Connell, working from one point to another mentally. He had no imagination whatever; he could comprehend cause and effect if he could see them both at once, like pressing a trigger and seeing a man fall. He wasn't really bad. Left alone, he would have been slow and good-natured, never harming anybody.

But he wasn't left alone. People had found that Connell would do anything he was told, because he didn't know any better, and he became a very convenient cat's paw. He was worth looking after, he was so tractable (except when anyone called him a dope). Apart from the rare occasions when he lost his temper, Connell was the ideal strong-arm man, provided the job didn't call for any brains.

He would shoot a man or hit someone over the head or heave a brick through a window, simply because one of his friends asked him to. He liked money, but as he had no idea of its value he would accept happily anything he was given. There was no haggling over terms with Dave Connell.

Connell had never really had to think before. Clearly, however, thinking was required now. Apparently there was a way of making sure that you didn't die. Miz had spent a long time telling him about it—Miz was his friend.

Someone would have to tell him the rest.

Connell had slowly, gradually been trained that if someone else had something you wanted, there was always a way to shake it out of him.

He nodded slowly, having reached a conclusion. He didn't want to die, ever. There was a way of never dying, apparently. He would get someone to show him the way, and no matter how hard it was, he would learn it.

Fred Fanstone had transformed himself into a sort of wandering Jew. He had a little English car in which he went from state to state, looking for he didn't know what.

He had a permanent frown now, not a frown of annoyance or anxiety so much as a frown of concentration. For he knew that this was the



most important period in the history of mankind. Nobody else seemed to. They must have known it, but they gave no sign of it.

And Fred felt partly responsible for the situation. He could have changed it. Now it was too late.

He would have liked to have Mercia with him, but she had disappeared—deliberately.

"I don't think we should meet again, Fred," she had said primly, "until Greg has been dead some time. It wouldn't be decent. We might lose our heads."

Fred had given a short, sharp bark of a laugh at the idea of Mercia ever losing her head.

Greg must have known for a long time before he died that if Mercia wasn't being unfaithful to him with Fred it was only because they were loyal to him. He had never said anything about it. But he must have known Fred and Mercia *were* loyal. Mercia was too proud, too correct, to do anything petty or mean. Fred was too bluntly honest to remain on good terms with a man whose wife he had seduced.

Perhaps Greg hadn't much minded dying and getting out of their way. Obviously to the end he had loved Mercia as he had always done,

Fred didn't often think of Renfield, or even, it must be admitted, of Mercia. Fred wasn't a man of high ideals, in the usual sense. He wasn't selfless and dedicated to the greatest good of the greatest number. But he hated to see a thing done wrong.

He would watch a man doing something, that characteristic frown of concentration on his brow, until at last it became clear that the workmen knew what he was doing. Then the frown would clear away from Fred's forehead and he'd walk away quite happily.

Or if the workman was doing it wrong, Fred would wait until he was sure and then go up to him and say bluntly: "Excuse me. Do you know you're doing . . ."

Often he was regarded as a busybody. Perhaps he was a busybody. Sometimes he meddled in things that were clearly no concern of his.

The immortality question, however, wasn't quite in that class. It was his concern. He had helped to discover it. He himself had been the first immortal, and Renfield and he had had to work hard to find exactly what had happened, what he'd done, why he could control certain physical functions and how he knew what to do with them.

He had to see what was happening to the process, how people were treating it, how it was treating people. He had to see that the thing was being done right, because . . .

Because he was Fred Fanstone.

Immortality it certainly seemed to be. Unfortunately, since mind was required, one couldn't try it out on short-lived animals and see what happened. But even in a few weeks there were decided signs that the immortals' *knowledge* was not merely a delusion.

Edward Arthur was eighty-eight and had just had to give up his brisk early-morning walk round the park. For him the process didn't represent immortality—at least, unlike most people, he didn't regard it as such at first.

To him it meant getting back things he had had to give up. It meant his morning walk round the park. Later, long country walks—swimming—even hill-climbing again. It meant the things that age had taken away from him.

In three weeks nothing spectacular had happened to Edward Arthur. He still looked an old man, though tall and erect. His hair was still white, his face still wrinkled.

But he had resumed his walk in the park. He didn't get stiff so easily. And his eyesight, which had always been good for a man of his years, was recovering some of its old sharpness.

People who were too old couldn't understand the process. Some of them were intelligent enough. Perhaps their failure to understand was

psychological. They felt old and tired and nearly dead. It was too much of an effort to take in new ideas and start over again.

Children couldn't understand it either, but that didn't matter. Children could wait.

The process didn't help all people who were ill. If their minds were clear they could accomplish wonders, often in a very short time. But comparatively few seriously ill people's minds were clear. If they were delirious, or in a fever, or unable to concentrate, they had no hope of using the Renfield process to help themselves. And nobody could use the process to help anyone else.

Also, many people who were ill were at least partly psychogenically ill. The process was absolutely impartial toward psychogenic illness. If patients really didn't want to recover, the process didn't force recovery on them. If they did, no matter how psychotically, the statement helped them.

And some illnesses couldn't be cured, if they were far enough advanced before the person concerned had a chance to apply the Renfield process. Where the nervous system itself was damaged (as Renfield's had been), people could never learn the control which was an integral part of the process. It was of no more use to them than a T.V. set to a blind man, or a left shoe to a man whose left leg was amputated.

"Jack was always like that," said Keith regretfully. "Couldn't wait. He'd take five dollars today instead of a hundred tomorrow."

"Maybe it's as well," Ramona sighed. "If he must always leap before he looks, maybe he's not the right father for Morris."

"Morris?"

"And Sandra."

Keith was Jack's brother. It was only natural that he should be talking the matter over with Ramona now that she and Jack had broken for keeps. It was perhaps not quite so necessary, so inevitable, that they should be talking the matter over on the beach, Keith's head in Ramona's lap.

But then, Ramona knew Keith almost as well as she knew Jack. Once Keith had taken her to a Christmas party and kissed her under the mistletoe. Keith was two years younger than Jack, slower, lazier, more cautious, more patient.

"Frankly," he murmured, "I don't think you need worry. From what I've heard of this process, I can't see it making people sterile. Still, I see your point of view. But look, if you insist on marrying some non-immortal, presumably not a moron, you're going to have some trouble finding one, aren't you?"

"I thought you'd waited, too," said Ramona quickly. "Didn't you say you only read the statement once, like me, then decided to wait and see what it did to others first?"

"Yes," Keith admittedly lazily. "But I haven't asked you to marry me."

"No," said Ramona. "That's so."

"After all, only the other day you were still engaged to Jack."

Ramona didn't say anything.

"But you're pretty," Keith admitted lightly. "If there's anyone suitable to be found, you'll find him."

Ramona took a deep breath and plunged, since Keith apparently wasn't going to.

"Would you advise me to start looking?" she demanded.

"You won't need to, probably. Because you're pretty, I mean," he added quickly.

"Oh."

"If a girl can be a better mantrap, though she live in a forest, the world will beat a path to her door."

"Will it?" said Ramona. "I don't see much sign of it."

"The darkest hour," said Keith, shutting his eyes, "is just before the dawn."

"Please try, Andrew," said Ruth, without much hope.

He had got past the stage of even answering her. He simply stared stubbornly out of the window.

Ruth thought once more of Dr. Jenner. He was a psychologist who claimed, indirectly to be able to increase the I.Q. Cases were reported of people who had failed to understand the immortality process, who had gone to Jenner and thereafter became immortal.

Ruth wasn't a fool. She knew Dr. Jenner was probably a clever man exploiting the situation. Normally she would have forgotten Dr. Jenner as she forgot the ads for courses which claimed to take off inches without surgery, without exercise, without dieting.

But Ruth was gradually becoming desperate, ready to clutch at straws. Even if this Dr. Jenner couldn't raise Andrew's I.Q., perhaps he could teach him the Renfield process somehow.

A tutor she had hired had failed to do that. The tutor's qualifications, however, had been entirely academic. Perhaps a psychologist could do something. This Dr. Jenner was a chance.

She rang up Dr. Jenner. A cultured female voice passed her on to a cultured male voice. Dr. Jenner listened to her sympathetically, putting in an intelligent question or two. She began to hope.

"Yes, by all means bring Andrew along," said Dr. Jenner pleasantly.

"I don't promise anything, Mrs. MacDonald. But the problem doesn't sound insoluble."

Putting the phone back in its cradle, Ruth said: "We're going out, Andrew."

"Where?" asked Andrew suspiciously.

"To see a man. You'll like him. He has a nice voice, the kind you like."

"All right," said Andrew indifferently. "So long as he doesn't go on about this Field thing."

She had never been able to give Andrew a motive for all the hours of mental effort. He had always had his own way before. He couldn't see why that should change. He couldn't believe it had changed.

Fred's frown wasn't lifting. It was becoming more and more grim.

Immortality changed people in one physical respect—they could take control of processes which had previously been run automatically, without benefit of human intelligence. It didn't change people in any other respect. So why should it suddenly make the world a better place?

It didn't.

Fighting didn't stop. Nor murder. Why should it? There were more hate killings, not fewer. It was much more worth while to kill an enemy now. It was more necessary to remove anyone who might be dangerous.

There were more strikes. There were more labour trouble of all kinds. Immortals were somebody. Immortals mattered. You couldn't push immortals around.

There were more street accidents than ever, apparently for the same reason. Megalomania. People thought they were so important now that cars and trucks couldn't hit them, couldn't mow them down. They marched into busy streets with a bold determination and decision that proclaimed *I am somebody*.

There were people who wouldn't do their jobs, because their jobs didn't seem worth while any more.

Then there were the people who couldn't be immortal. Some of them went quietly mad with jealousy. Some of them went wildly mad with jealousy. Almost all of them believed that somehow they had been cheated, deliberately, maliciously. Most of these people were dangerous.

Fred was present in a bar one night when suddenly, without the slightest warning, a quiet little man in a corner took a gun from his pocket and started spraying the saloon with bullets. Four people were killed before the little man could be arrested.

It turned out, of course, that the little man couldn't be an immortal. He had never shown the slightest sign of resenting the fact, or resenting anything, for that matter. He was one of the most inoffensive characters in town—until something burst in his brain and he obeyed the order to *kill, kill, kill*!

There were fewer sex murders than usual, because now there was a stronger murder motive than sex.

Fred just missed being present when a woman in a dance-hall exploded a bomb that killed herself and eleven others. Oddly enough, this woman was supposed to be an immortal. Her reason was never found. Perhaps she had only pretended she had mastered the process. At any rate, her husband, who might have had the answer, died with her in the explosion.

Once in the dark a girl tried to slip a knife in Fred's ribs. Fortunately for him she was not only stupid but had an abnormally slow reaction time. At the cost of a slashed hand he was able to take the knife from her and turn her in before she did any more damage.

The general picture wasn't obviously serious. Though there were far more crimes of violence than usual, they generally occurred in unsavoury spots, and the ordinary decent citizen could pretend to himself, if he liked, that they didn't concern him. He merely read about them. He wasn't involved in them himself, and they meant no more to him than newspaper reports had always meant—something that happened to other people.

The figures would alarm anyone, but otherwise the world gave the appearance of going on much as usual. Apart from the strikes and the incivil shop assistants, telephone operators and mailmen there was little sign of anything out of the ordinary in everyday life.

People even stopped talking about immortality. It was accepted. It was a fact. Even the fear of sterility had been removed—some immortal women had become pregnant, others had safely delivered normal children conceived before the Renfield statement. With that small worry gone, what was there to say about immortality until something new came out about it?

However, one department shared Fred's concern—the police department. Murder was not only far too frequent, it was far too easy. Motive was the key to most difficult cases—and now motive, as law courts understood it, often hardly existed.

Al Shenks was so scared of Miz Bentley that he decided Miz had to be got rid of somehow. He approached Dave Connell, but Connell surprisingly insisted that Miz was his friend and he didn't kill his friends.

So Al had to arrange that Jim Smetton would do the job. Al wasn't scared of Smetton.

But Smetton was scared of Al. The result was that there were two killings instead of one, with Al elected to fill the second vacancy.

Immortality made an enormous difference to fear and all its manifestations. Before immortality, one man could be scared of another without thinking in terms of life and death. There wasn't so much to lose, then.

Now, one could live for ever if one was left alone. But what good was that unless one was secure? One had to be utterly secure, utterly safe, utterly certain. It wasn't fifty more years that hung by a thread, it was all eternity. All threats had to be removed—whatever that meant in terms of human life.

Murder was a risk, true. People burned for murder. However, that was a smaller risk, a more distant risk, than being murdered. Especially now when the homicide bureau had so much unfinished business on its hands.

It wasn't long before another killer saw Jim Smetton as a threat. Smetton was found with a bullet between his eyes.

PRESIDENT APPEALS screamed the headlines.

The President had made a rather unusual speech. He didn't appeal to the law-abiding to stamp out the crime wave. He appealed to the lawless themselves. Couldn't they see that murder would beget murder? The killer now had two enemies—the law and the lawless. If he escaped one, the other would get him.

The speech really had some effect. The murder wave subsided for a while.

Then it surged again. The trouble was, it took two to make peace. The criminal is maladjusted and professionally suspicious. How can the man who has declared war on society feel secure to enjoy the gift of life eternal? He feels he must ensure his security, build his security on the bones of men who might threaten it. Others feel the same way about him.

There were more self-defence killings in a month than there had been in the last ten years.

And still the ordinary citizen could look on as if it didn't concern him. Let the mobsters kill each other. Instead of going to the movies, which might turn out to be dangerous, one could watch T.V. at home. A little care crossing the street, a little caution about where one went—that was all that was necessary.

The ordinary citizen, in fact, followed his usual course of being alarmed at some things which weren't worth all that concern, and unperturbed at some others which were worth, at least, a little anxiety.

Ruth looked up eagerly as Dr. Jenner came back into his room.

Tentatively he brushed against her. She caught his arm, as if by accident, let it go quickly, and apologised. Ruth's eagerness wasn't all on Andrew's account.

Dr. Jenner was young, suave and very good-looking. He also knew on which side his bread was buttered. He was considering very carefully what was best for Roger Jenner as he sat down and looked at Ruth. But then, that was nothing unusual; he practically always was.

"Mrs. MacDonald," he began tentatively.

"Ruth," she said.

"All right, Ruth. I'm going to pay you the compliment, Ruth, of telling you the truth. I could go on taking your money and working on Andrew—and I believe, frankly, that that's what you'll want me to do anyway. But I think you'd better know that there's only about a five per cent chance that I'll ever be able to do what you want me to do."

He watched her anxiously, though he gave no sign of his anxiety. Perhaps he should have concentrated on Andrew and exploited that line to the full. But it had seemed from the first well worth while working on Ruth rather than Andrew.

Ruth nodded. "I guessed that, Roger," she said. "But I'm glad you told me. I thought . . ."

"You thought I'd go on taking your money as long as I could, making promises I knew I couldn't fulfill?"

"Yes," said Ruth simply.

Jenner smiled gently. "Ruth, may I tell you how I think you should try to treat Andrew, what position you should try to give him in your life, and how you should regard him?"

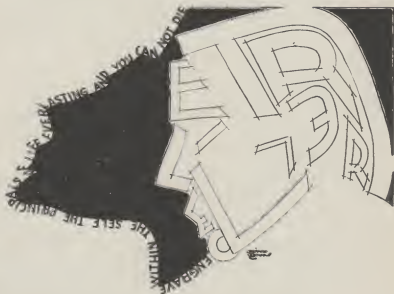
"Please do," said Ruth.

"You know he's not quite normal," said Jenner carefully. "You've always been just a little afraid it was your fault—though at the same time you knew that was nonsense, of course. In any case, Andrew's eighteen now. He'll probably live more than sixty years yet. Don't you think . . ." He paused so that he could catch her eye and hold it with his own steady gaze. "Don't you think that in sixty years you'll have punished yourself enough for a fault that wasn't yours?"

"What do you mean?" asked Ruth, though she knew.

"Won't it be better for Andrew to die at the proper time than live for ever? You love him, I know. But—assuming you are actually immortal—won't you have loved him enough by the time he's eighty?"

He had a wonderful voice. It didn't really matter much what he said; it was still thrilling to sit and listen to it.



Jenner knew everything was going according to plan. He knew it was safe now to say: "Think of yourself for a change, Ruth. Think of your own life, not Andrew's. Your own happiness. If you're happy, it won't hurt you to see Andrew growing older while you remain young."

He said it.

Ruth wasn't naive. She knew almost everything that Jenner was thinking. If he thought fortune-hunting was as easy as that it was time he learned better.

She was quite prepared to teach him. And in the end, when he had learned his lesson . . . Well, she had been single long enough. And marriage wasn't irrevocable, like immortality.

Eugenia Naylor was the daughter of Gene Naylor, the oil king. Oil took up so much of his time that he saw Eugenia only occasionally, and Eugenia's mother had died when she was four. Perhaps behind that somewhere was the reason for Eugenia's passion for sport of all kinds.

No one had ever said that Eugenia was brilliant, and though quite a few men had said she was beautiful, none of them had really meant it. They had been thinking of something else at the time, possibly her father's money. Beyond a trim, lithe figure, she had no claims to beauty, and no claims to intelligence either, beyond the fact that she could understand the immortality process.

Eugenia had a surf-riding accident, and broke an arm. She was thrown from a horse and broke a leg. She had a ski-ing accident, but didn't break anything. She crashed through a barrier at the ice-rink, and still didn't break anything except the barrier.

Eugenia fell from a high-diving board and was killed. Her father was heartbroken.

The story of Eugenia was a tale with a moral, if you looked for it.

When Fred picked up the phone he expected it was merely someone at the manager's office ringing about some routine matter. None of his friends knew where he was, and he knew no one in town. He had just checked in.

It was a pleasant shock to hear Mercia's voice.

"Hello, Fred," she said, as calmly as if she had been ringing him every day for weeks.

"Mercia!" Fred exclaimed. "Now wait—before you say what you have to say and ring off, tell me where I can find you."

Mercia's quiet, liquid laugh sounded a little tinny over the phone. Phones had never done her voice justice.

"I had a dickens of a job finding *you*," she said. "But I did, and I suppose I can do it again when I want to. How's it going, Fred?"

"You should know," he told her. "You live in the same world as I do. Tell me Mercia, do you think immortality is sending the whole world mad?"

"Not at all," she said mildly. "You know, your trouble, Fred, is you can never stand back and look at things. You always have to be in the thick of them. Really, you'd see more if you took a rest for a while and watched the world go by."

"Can I see you, Mercia?"

"Keep to one thing at a time," she said reprovingly. "I take it *you* believe immortality is sending the world mad?"

"If you can call it immortality," said Fred bitterly, "with more violent deaths every day than in a week of world war."

"That's a short-term view," said Mercia lightly. "It's a pity, but—"

"A pity! Are you going mad too?"

"Calm down. Read the bible."

"For Christ's sake!"

"Well, yes, if you like to put it that way."

"Stop being cryptic," said Fred crossly. "I want to see you, Mercia."

"I gathered that."

"Why ring me if you won't let me come and see you?"

"To make sure you still wanted to."

"Oh. Well, that's something."

"Isn't it? Wait a little longer, Fred. 'Bye now."

"Is that all you wanted to say?"

"Obviously."

"What's this about the bible?"

"Read it and see. People don't read the bible enough."

And she rang off. Fred slammed down the receiver, trying to break it. He didn't succeed. Phones are made robustly.

He still heard, sounding in his ears, the primness of her last remark. She meant it. Mercia was an odd mixture of intelligence and correctness.

It was a mixture he had always wanted to study at closer quarters.

Ramona leaned back, breathless.

"I wanted you to do that," she admitted. "I've been asking for it, I know. But now I'm not so sure I was right."

Keith moved to kiss her again, but she held him back. He frowned, then grinned.

"Why the sudden misgivings?" he asked.

"Because it *has* been so sudden. It's a nice romantic idea that boy meets girl and in five minutes, more or less, they're engaged and married and living happily ever after. Does it ever really happen, though?"

"If you're worrying about me," said Keith lightly, "you can stop. I've loved you for a long time, Ramona. But you don't take your brother's girl away from him—even if you can."

"I see," said Ramona.

"When you and Jack quarrelled, I might have been able to patch it up, I suppose. I don't know. Depends on whether you two let me patch it up or not."

He grinned. "But that was carrying brotherly love too far, I thought," he said. "If Jack couldn't appreciate you, that was his bad luck. I wasn't going to leave you lying on the beach for the next beachcomber who happened along to pick up."

"I like that!" Ramona exclaimed indignantly.

"Good, I'm glad you see my point of view. When I ask you to marry me, Ramona, it isn't on impulse. It's very hard-headed and

carefully thought out. If it's a mistake, then I'm crazy. What do you say?"

"I do like that sensible streak in you, Keith," Ramona admitted.

"Sure you do. You've got one just like it. Who else but you would be so cautious about immortality that she'd refuse it until she'd had her children?"

"It doesn't matter so much now," Ramona said. "Immortals are having children—only a few of them, not nearly so many as before, but some. Still—would you wait, Keith?"

"Before becoming immortal? Sure, Ramona. You're perfectly right. We could have a boy and a girl anyway, and then think about immortality—what say?"

Ramona smiled happily. "You can kiss me again, Keith," she murmured.

"Hell, no," retorted Keith. "Not when it's put like that. You'll say you want me to kiss you or I won't do it."

"I *want* you to kiss me, Keith," said Ramona.

"Feel better about Andrew now, dear?" said Jenner. He still had his professional smile, though Ruth MacDonald had been Ruth Jenner for some time.

That was the great thing about Roger, Ruth thought. He played the game, but so did a lot of other men—the point was, Roger went on playing it. He had married her for her money, but once he got his hands on some of it, and saw quite clearly that he wasn't going to get his hands on any more, he didn't change in a split second into someone else, someone hard and cold and mercenary. He stayed the same as ever, suave, tactful, understanding.

"Much better," she said. "You know, I think I'm beginning to understand why I felt as I did about Andrew, and why I don't now."

"Free consultation," said Jenner. "Go ahead, honey."

"I didn't have a baby until it was too late to have another one. So I couldn't show it wasn't my fault that Andrew wasn't too bright. Now, maybe I can."

Jenner smiled professionally again. "That's right, darling," he said soothingly.

"Don't just agree with me. What do you think?"

Jenner shrugged, but didn't refuse to say what he really thought. "I don't think you'll have another child for a long time. Possibly never, not for forty years or so anyway. But—"

"I'll show you," said Ruth, determination in her voice.

"You do that, darling," said Jenner gently.

"Tell me," said Connell.

"For God's sake!" Sam exclaimed, his eyes roving round the room.

"I've told you so many times—"

"Tell me again," said Connell.

"Look, Dave," said Sam desperately. "You'll never understand it. Some people don't. There's no way to make them see—"

"You telling me that I'm dumb?" asked Connell dangerously.

"No, Dave, nothing like that. But look, I've been here two days now, and all we've got to show for it is . . ."

He gulped as Connell raised his fist. The blow didn't fall, however, and Sam went on quickly:

"Let me go, Dave. Maybe I'm the one who's dumb—yes, that's it," he added eagerly. "I'm not the right guy, Dave. I'm not smart enough to explain it to you. Why don't you get someone who's good at explaining things?"

"You can do this thing, can't you?"

"Yes, but—"

"Then give."

Sam started again. Connell had a little more intelligence than Andrew MacDonald. Connell knew what he was missing, Andrew didn't. Andrew would never care about immortality. Connell cared so much that he was prepared to beat up Sam until he passed on the secret, a thing Connell didn't like doing. He didn't mind killing people, but he hated hurting them.

Connell had tried a lot of other ways, a lot of other people. In the end he had rented three rooms in a house where no one was curious, a house with thick walls, floors and ceilings. With the two rooms on either side empty and locked, no one could hear a sound from the windowless room where he had Sam—he'd checked with a blaring phonograph.

Sam wasn't going to leave that room until Connell was immortal.

Once again Sam explained the Renfield statement, the idea of physical control, the purpose, the effect. Sam wasn't normally patient, but now he had to be. He was eleven stone, and Connell was fifteen. He had nothing in his pockets, and Connell's were filled with such ingenious instruments as knuckledusters, rubber tubing and lead pipes.

It was ironical that Sam had once been in Dave's position, trying to get the secret of immortality from people who wouldn't give it to him. But Sam didn't appreciate the irony. He wanted to chop Connell as he had chopped Griffin, knee him and kick him. He had tried that and failed—often. He wasn't going to try it again.

Over and over he told himself that someone as smart as himself must surely be able to put something over anyone as dumb as Connell. But Connell had realised his own limitations, and arranged things so that there was nothing Sam could do. There was nothing Sam could use as a weapon, no reason that Connell would accept for leaving the house or permitting Sam to leave it. Connell would settle for nothing less than the secret—a "secret" which was open to anyone who had the intelligence to understand it.

"Go back to the beginning," said Connell.

"But look, Dave," Sam protested. "You don't ever see this if you go back to the beginning. You've got to go through it, because the end makes the start clear."

"I said go back to the beginning."

"But you understood that. We have to go on to the things you haven't seen yet."

Connell paused. "You want to do the things I don't know? You want to keep me from ever seeing how to do this?"

"No, nothing like that, Dave," said Sam desperately. "Do it my way. It's the only way. I know."

Connell did as he was told. Sam knew now that hopeless as the task might seem, his only chance of release lay in making Connell immortal.

But presently Connell said: "Go back to the beginning."

Something broke in Sam. He had been driven to the limit and past it.

"Not a damn thing more will I do," he said distinctly. "You're kidding yourself, Connell. Anyone who was ever going to understand this would have seen it long ago."

"Go back to the beginning."

"Why? What good will it do? You say I'm not going to get out of here until you're immortal. And you're never going to be immortal, any more than a dog or a cat or any other animal—"

Connell slugged him. He wasn't really angry, like when someone called him a dope. He meant only to silence Sam for a while and carry on later.

But as Sam fell he realised there wasn't going to be a later. Sam was right. All the things that Sam had tried and failed to teach him added up to the plain fact that Dave Connell was never going to be able to do the things that would enable him to live for ever.

Connell went out of the room, leaving Sam lying still on the floor. He didn't feel any impulse to beat Sam's brains out, knowing somehow that Sam had done his best and the fault was his, not Sam's.

It didn't matter anyway. Connell had struck harder than he meant to. Sam wasn't dead yet, but he was going to die very soon.

Some people, knowing Sam, might have said it was just as well.

"Sign here, sir," said the clerk.

Fred unscrewed his pen to sign yet another hotel register. Perhaps Mercia was right. Perhaps he should stay still instead of travelling all over the country. Wherever he went the story was the same anyway.

True, things were beginning to settle down. The worst of the crime wave was over, it was said. There were only about twice as many murders now as there had been before the immortality statement.

But the strikes continued. There was still the same unrest, the same tension, the same megalomania. It wasn't the world it had been before the statement. It wasn't a happier world. It showed no sign of being a better world.

He forgot all about immortality when he saw the last name in the register.

"No," said Mercia's voice behind him, "you haven't found me by accident."

He turned. She was smiling.

"We've waited long enough," she said. "When are we going to get married?"

Fred recovered himself with an effort. "I must say you take me very much for granted," he observed.

"You're keeping the man waiting," she said reprovingly, pointing at the register.

He signed. When he turned again she was moving along the corridor in the direction of the lounge, with her silent, easy walk. From behind he saw something about her he hadn't noticed from the front. She was younger—of course. She was wearing a hip-hugging wool skirt and a close-fitting blouse that she would never have worn a year ago—not so much because she couldn't as because in her usual prim, correct way she would have regarded them as unsuitable for a woman who had been married fifteen years.

He hurried past her and held the door open for her. She smiled at him, and he wondered how he could have failed to notice at once how much more beautiful she was. It wasn't mere youth, it was physical youth and mental maturity, together in her as they could never have been before the Renfield statement. She had the mellowness and grace of a woman of nearly forty with the health and bloom of a girl of eighteen. Well, not quite. Not yet. But it was coming.

"If I were anyone else," he said bluntly, "I might be a little shy now you've turned into a glamour girl."

"Silly," said Mercia. "You're younger too."

He stared. He hadn't thought of that. He had been thinking of himself as almost middle-aged, and Mercia as a mere girl again. But obviously it worked both ways.

"Still think Greg was wrong to hand the process out the way he did?" she asked.

He frowned. "I still don't know."

"Didn't you read your bible?" she asked mockingly.

"What part?"

"I was thinking chiefly of the sermon on the mount. Look, Fred, don't you see what's happened? Violence begets violence. Murder begets murder. People can get away with crime some of the time, but not all of the time. Not through all eternity. The criminal of today is possibly the criminal of yesterday, probably the criminal of tomorrow. Many criminals are already dead—with a few innocent people true, but far more criminals than innocent people. More will die. This year, next year, some time short of never.

"Can't you see that giving the world immortality has harmed only the people we can well do without?"

She knew she had said enough to set Fred's rather cumbersome imagination in motion. She stopped.

He looked at her for fully five minutes without saying a word.

Stupid people would still have children. Some of the children would become immortals, some wouldn't. There would always be some mortals, but fewer and fewer as time went on. Stupidity was being bred out, gradually but quite definitely.

Criminals of any kind would be successful, according to their ability, for a time. But though perhaps nothing could be proved against a man over a period of fifty years, something would certainly be proved against him in five hundred. Crime wasn't going to pay for much longer. It was going to become, in a way it had never been before, a game that wasn't worth the candle.

Only the men whom someone believed to be a threat had been murdered. It was blind, savage justice, but it was justice of a kind.

Only the suicides still killed themselves. If someone kept running mad risks until he or she died, then that had been the purpose all along. Humanity, or immortality, couldn't save such people. If anyone did, it had to be themselves.

Only the people who lacked the intelligence to understand the highest goals and achievements of mankind failed to become immortal. It was a natural, not a manmade division. The difference between high and low intelligence wasn't a difference in degree, it was a differ-

ence in kind. Art and beauty, truth, philosophy, science, mathematics, justice, ethics meant nothing to men and women of under I.Q. 88. Such things are abstractions; so, in a way, was immortality. It wasn't a thing, it was a way—active, not passive—not *life eternal* but *live for ever*.

"Yes," said Fred at last. "You could be right, Mercia. We'll have to wait a long time to see. What was this about the sermon on the mount? I don't know the bible well enough to have the slightest idea what you're talking about."

"You know this, though," said Mercia quietly. "Everybody does. Matthew five, verse five. A prophecy, perhaps.

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."

—J. T. McIntosh.

E r r a t u m

We regret that George Whitley's novelette *The Wrong Track*, announced in our last issue as due to be published in No. 11, has been held over until the next issue owing to the difficulty in fitting its length into this issue.

Serious science fiction is often ponderous although stimulating and thought-provoking, but the whimsical side of scientific invention can be turned to good effect in the hands of such a competent writer as Mr. Rowland, new to this particular field.

WHERE'S THE MATTER ?

By RICHARD ROWLAND

It's a ' Songhga té u Ogghleie '—to quote the Venusian proverb—that the miracle of yesterday is the commonplace of today: that something that once made a Telecast extra is, in a matter of months, accepted to such an extent that no more notice is taken of it than of the departure of the 8.18 Marsman from Satellite 6.

For instance, you, who now so casually push the buttons, or if you have the latest model, give the tone-code to your matter receivers, probably have no notion of the human drama which lay behind the invention and development of the first of these useful little gadgets. Neither did I until I undertook the assignment from Tritech to write up the story.

Bendon Hardacre was the man's name and even that will be news to most for he never got the credit for it. I might add here that there is no point in any other Hardacres trying to collect back-royalties because Bendon died without issue, and the sole remaining relative, a small-time prospector named Barney Hardacre, is still, owing to that tragic miscalculation in the April III affair some years ago, orbiting Pluto—about as far removed as a cousin can be. However, as the sort

of man he was plays as great a part in the story as does the curious course of his research and his strange experiments, perhaps it's as well to begin at the beginning.

According to those who remember him or recall hearing about him, Bendon, as a small boy, was not exactly a paragon. His old headmaster, still living, said at once "That ornery skunk!" and unhesitatingly gave him 100 per cent. for obstinacy, greed, and self-interest, and between 99.4 and 99.5 per cent. for downright unpleasantness. He also awarded him a consistent zero for friendliness, decency and games ability. I gathered that only unnatural skill in producing unpleasant little weapons of defence prevented him from harm, for he was physically feeble, at the hands of his schoolmates. I never heard so much ill spoken of the dead except, perhaps, about dear old Hitler before they decided he was such a nice fellow.

Further enquiries, however, revealed that young Bendon had had a few redeeming features. He was affectionate, when he thought it was worth while, and he was generous with the things for which he no longer had any use. Well-meaning friends of the family discussing the boy, for he was apparently a favourite topic, frequently told Ma Hardacre not to worry: her little Bendon, they assured her, would be different when he grew up. He was. He had no redeeming features.

He did not bother to show affection when he wanted anything; he took it. And he kept everything; even down to the onophane wrappers of his vito-capsules and the tubes of his razing cream. He simply could not bear to give anything away, and as for sharing, well, from all accounts the word wasn't in his vocabulary.

It was these early characteristics, coupled with the fact that he had a singularly one-track mind—part of his genius no doubt—that later developed to make him all too obviously a psychopathic case; so much so that at the end, when the only possible chance of complete success lay in a radical change of heart, he was utterly incapable of it. He just couldn't help himself.

The town of Linesend where the Hardacres lived was not then a notably prosperous one and the family fitted in well. I could find no trace whatever of a Mr. Hardacre but Ma and Bendon's sister Benda, were recalled in the friendliest terms. Conversations with the local citizenry tended to follow much the same pattern. "Ma Hardacre? Ah! a nice person, and Benda too, but him!" 'Him' was usually followed, according to the temperament and inhibitions of the individual, by a black look, uplifted eyes, or the ejection of saliva in the general direction of the disposer. When I told them what he had accomplished and suggested that, at least, he had shown devotion to

an idea, they would have none of it. "He was plumb lazy that one. Reckon he invented the thing to save himself the trouble of going down to the store."

The Hardacres lived in a small frame house of the antique type side by side with others in a narrow back street. The fact that the old power lines still loop from pylon to pylon is pointer enough to the town's situation in the back of beyond. Forty years ago the place must have been even more of an anachronism and I found it hard to believe that the world's first matter-transmitter was constructed there. But the story's signed, documented, sealed, inalienably sewn up.

From an early age, some put it as low as a mere eight years, young Bendon Hardacre took to working in a small shed at the end of what Ma Hardacre called 'the plot,' and the neighbours, more accurately because they used it as such, 'the dump.' In those days power actually still came via the pylon lines which crossed directly above young Bendon's workshed, and it was from these, over the score or so years that remained to him, that he obtained a considerable number of totally free units for the operation of the various pieces of equipment that he had borrowed, invented, or stolen. It will be noticed that the word 'bought' does not figure, and it is here that another piece of the pattern of Bendon Hardacre's life falls into place, for whatever the family may have had, besides Bendon that is, money to spare for anything else but food was not included.

At the age of twenty-three, Bendon Hardacre, if reports are to be believed, already looked an old man. Naturally weedy, with a flat chest and bulging, short-sighted, pale blue eyes, he had lost the last of his ginger hair by the time he received the key of the door. The eccentricities which had seemingly been born in him made him the natural butt of the neighbours rough humour, a process which drove him further into himself so that he spent more and more time in the Shed. It was further observed that as his clothes fell to pieces through the years he would do no more than cover them with less decrepit garments which served to hold the remaining tattered shreds around him.

He would toil for weeks on end without ceasing, emerging only when he was too exhausted to continue. Those who managed to sneak a glance into the Shed report that it was cluttered to the ceiling with an awesome collection of gadgets, lights, dials, coils of wire, old iron pipes, plastic crates, and junk of every description. "There was more in there than there was on the dump," a neighbour told me, "and that's saying something."

So we have the recluse, the hermit-scientist striving there in the Shed at the end of the Hardacre plot. Of his thoughts as he worked

we can know little. From such notes as were recovered it can be deduced that desire for money was not the driving force although, judging from results which survived him, many of his experiments were angled to obtain it but solely in order to finance further experiments.

This is not the place for any but the most sketchy mention of Bendon Hardacre's earlier experiments and inventions, details of which would fill, and in time probably will fill, several volumes. He seems to have had the most astonishing run of bad luck, experiencing a mounting pressure of adverse circumstances which, while leaving him undeterred, yet impelled him to his unfortunate and untimely end.

One or two of his more ambitious devices, however, are of definite interest in that they indicate the lines on which he was working although and by the way, how he managed to produce anything at all from the pitifully meagre materials at his disposal baffles the imagination.

His notes, in a personal shorthand that took Inter-Planet Languages Bureau three solid months to crack, show that he invented a boring machine capable of penetrating earth and rock at a rate of more than a mile an hour (100 yards in 3 minutes was his noted record), on a face measuring a yard wide by two high. The remains of a tunnel, now blocked up, was found to lead from the Shed to close by the Linesend Bank, a distance of nearly half a mile. Other tunnels were later found to have been near-misses at the Bank premises and show that, genius though he undoubtedly was, he had little sense of direction.

It has since been deduced, both from a close examination of the tunnel and from reading between the lines of his notes, that what he had actually invented must have been the forerunner of our present disintegrators. Expert opinion has it that it was probably even more efficient. The notes mention a blue-print but this, as also several others, has disappeared.

It is not difficult to understand Bendon Hardacre's mental processes regarding money. The flashing, peerless brilliance of his mind was balanced, although that is not perhaps the correct word, by an extraordinary simplicity of approach to all else. Thus, to him, money must have meant the Linesend Bank. He never appeared to realise that there were other ways of getting it and other places where the stuff might be found. The Linesend Bank and its contents became an obsession with him. His single-track mind had found its terminus; it only remained to find ways and means of getting in there and getting out again with money.

There has not, to my knowledge, ever been a satisfactory explanation put forward as to why Bendon failed to rob the Bank when he had once arrived within a mere fifty yards of the strong room, even though

he was not directly below it. No more than a few seconds work with the disintegrator stood between him and all the money he needed. One can imagine him, short-sighted and stooping, standing in the tunnel his genius had made possible, looking at the negligible amount of earth that remained ahead of him. The fact that most of the tunnel had collapsed behind him meant nothing. He had only to blast his way back.

Two theories have been put forward, and I would remind you that force-fields had not then been adapted for the below-ground protection of property. The first is that he didn't know where he was: that he became discouraged and furious at his continuous failure to locate the Bank buildings with any precision; and he was a precise man. The second, and knowing now the perpetual penury that dogged the family, this is the one to which I subscribe, is that he had not sufficient cable (remember that there was neither beamed nor broadcast power at that time), to stretch from the Shed to the Bank, and, of course, he had no money with which to buy any.

Those who maintain that a man of Bendon Hardacre's single-mindedness would have somehow acquired some cable have not heard at first hand, as I have, of his earlier depredations. There was not a house in that street, so I was assured, which then possessed an electricity supply. At least, the supply was there but no wires remained by which to utilise it. Bendon had taken the lot, coaxing and pulling, twisting and cutting and drawing away every last bit of wire. Nobody doubted that he was responsible but nobody could prove it; one bit of wire looks much like another. As I said, the area was not a prosperous one and eventually the neighbours could not afford to go on renewing their wiring systems. They took to the almost forgotten oil lamps and stuck to them until Bendon's demise.

After the tunnels, Bendon Hardacre turned his attention to the opposite direction and his next attack came from the sky. His notes make it clear that he set out to adapt the old idea of a guided missile. It was, perhaps, an obvious step because it overcame the wire shortage. Even so, it took him several weeks of non-stop labour and he cannibalised most of the disintegrator in the process. The basic set-up, of course, was no sort of problem at all. All he needed was the missile with its telehead—he used the old-fashioned turbo-drive, speed being unimportant—and the normal control equipment in the Shed. He knocked up these items while he pondered the more complicated aspects. The thing had to have a control system that would be quite phenomenally accurate for he would have to be able to control its movements to within a fraction of an inch. Mere proximity action would have been worse than useless.

He succeeded in this aim and the thing worked like a charm although once more the unfortunate Bendon benefitted not at all. I had discovered earlier in my investigations that the blue-prints of this apparatus, clearly mentioned in Bendon's notes, were missing. However, by great good luck I heard that the man who had been manager of the Bank at the time of Bendon's missile effort was still living in retirement in the next town. I dropped over by flycab as soon as I could. Clink, who looked young for his 101 years, remembered Bendon Hardacre without any prompting. 'A strange, hermit-like man,' he said. 'I often wondered what became of him.'

I told him and asked whether he knew any other details, such as, for instance, anything about a certain guided missile. Had a strange object ever found its way into his Bank. 'It's odd that you should ask that,' he muttered. 'But then, in the circumstances, perhaps it isn't.' He levered himself up from his couch, crossing the room to a cupboard in the opposite wall, and, to my utter amazement, produced the thing. He put it on the table in front of me and returned to the couch. "Forgotten all about it," he grunted. "Ah! Um! So that was Hardacre! Yes, remember it all now. June it was, just before the half year. Lovely day . . ." He rumbled on but I wasn't listening; I was staring at the object on the table.

It was about a foot long, no more, and was made, so far as I could tell, of that special alloy, Lghlagathium, which caused such a furore when it was brought back from one of Saturn's moons. Heaven knows how Bendon had got hold of that. The missile had clearly been a beautifully made job, although now it was dented and battered and the wide-view telelenses in the snout and belly of its smooth cigar-shaped body were broken. Projecting from its back were folding rotors, twin, concentric, contra-rotating, and also badly chipped, while from its sides extended telescopic, octopus-like arms with finger grabs at the ends. I lifted it up: it was astonishingly light, weighing no more than a few pounds.

". . . came in at the door," the ex-manager was saying, "like some gigantic bee, knocked old Brownstairs hat off—one of my best clients—and drove over the teller's grille like a flying bomb. Seemed to know what it was doing, too, for while Smith and I gaped at it, it fluttered over the one Sonar bills without touching them and made straight for the centuries and thousands piled behind them. Then those little hands shot out and grabbed the lot and it rose in the air again. By that time I had recovered a bit from the shock and I made a leap for it. I was quite an athlete in those days." He sighed and paused.

"What happened then?" I asked.

"I caught it before it reached the door," he went on, "and gave it a bash with a ruler. It didn't seem to like that, sort of flew in circles and I gave it another crack that sent it shooting into the safe. I jumped over and slammed the door. We could hear it buzzing and banging about inside for quite a while and then it stopped. We went in after about an hour and there it was lying on its back with its hands in the air like a dead bee." He stopped and his eyes had a far-away look as though somehow he had sympathised with it. "Just like a dead bee," he repeated.

"But didn't you tell Security?" I asked.

"Didn't seem any point," he said. "We hadn't lost anything. I just took it home and tried to mend it and make it work again but it never did."

"And you never saw another one?"

He shook his head. "I retired about a year afterward: came on out here to grow things."

It is not difficult to picture the despair Bendon Hardacre must have felt, sitting there in the Shed and helpless to stop the attack on his precious missile for he must have seen it all unless the manager's first furious assault had busted the front televiewer. One can hazard the guess that if he could have afforded to build another he would have equipped it with one of the paralysing sprays or some other form of temporary knockout.

After this setback he had not much equipment left to cannibalize, in fact he must have been near to the end of his tether, and it says much for his indomitable spirit that he found the courage not merely to go on but to embark on the most difficult task he had yet attempted for it must have been at about this time, shortly after the second bank raid, that he began work on what was to be his masterpiece.

Once again lack of cash had snatched success from him and, once again, the man's one-track mind allowed him no deviation from the original aim of extracting money by some means from the Linesend Bank and the Linesend Bank alone. It should be borne in mind that he was, more than ever now, constitutionally incapable of either selling his inventions or of sharing them. It was simply not in his nature to hand over anything or part of anything that was his. In fact, his attitude to the Bank must by now have become more than a fixation; it must have been his food, his drink, his whole life. It is even possible that he no longer remembered what he wanted the money for. So he kept on working, stopping so infrequently for food that he was little more than a bone framework with barely enough skin to cover it.

Neighbours speak of this period as being one of unusual activity in the Shed, significant of Bendon Hardacre's desperate onslaught on his problem. He kept it up for days and nights on end and would then, so they surmised, creep back into the house and pass out; or perhaps he passed out in the Shed. Just what Ma Hardacre thought of all this they never really knew but they spoke of seeing her gaunt, grey-haired figure knocking vainly on the Shed door and shouting through it; a procedure which ended always in the same way, with her leaving a tray on the ground outside and striding wearily back to the house which she must have hated, for she was alone now. Bendon's sister Benda had earlier married a space-crewman and she was at that time a hostess on the Ganymede run. She died later, as did so many more before adgilin was discovered, of the so-called red-rot which she picked up during a vacation on Mars.

But to resume. We know from Bendon's notes that he took more trouble than ever before to test and retest each part of the apparatus and, when the thing was actually completed and working, he went on testing.

This period undoubtedly ties in with neighbours' reports to the effect that the Hardacre plot looked tidier than it had ever been, the junk and debris of years disappearing almost overnight, although a few more holes and hollows were added to those made earlier by Bendon's preliminary workouts with the disintegrator. People in the street and round about were used to missing things but this was different and on a larger scale.

As several of them told me, it was one thing to find, for instance, that the chutes from the kitchen were no longer in place—metal or plastic Bendon always found a use for them—but when it came to going upstairs to bed and finding the room gone, that was another matter. They even took to viewing Bendon with slightly more favour and felt not too good about blaming him all those years for all the other things they had lost because he seemed to do no more now than moon around the plot with a smallish black box.

It became clear to me later that during this period Bendon Hardacre was making good use of the neighbours' deposited junk and, at the same time, getting his own back with a little extra practice to test the efficiency of the focussing device. It was also approximately at this time that a neighbour, perhaps more conventional, certainly braver than the rest, knocked on the door of the Shed to inform Bendon that Ma Hardacre had passed to a better world. Possibly owing to pre-occupation with a more than usually intricate problem, Bendon muttered only that he thought she had been out for a long walk and then returned to his studies. Be that as it may, Bendon must soon after-

wards have decided that the matter transmitter had passed every test and was ready for the great occasion.

As his notes record he wasted no time, orce the vital decision had been made but hurried straight off to the Bank. I traced two of the townsfolk who had clear recollections of directing him on that memorable day so that it would appear that, owing to his long and self-imposed incarceration in the Shed he had forgotten the location. The fact that he actually spoke to strangers is likewise indicative of his state of mind.

One can imagine Bendon Hardacre's thoughts as he trudged through the town, down streets along which he had not passed since he was a boy, with his precious black box under one arm. He had tried from below and he had tried from above, now he was going right into the place in person. He had shrunk by now to something under five feet in height and he looked about four times his age. Somehow his clothes still hung together. In spite of his peculiar attire he was not the type who attracted more than a passing glance. So on he went down the street and without hesitation walked through the wide open double doors of his Valhalla. He had never been in a Bank before but he knew what money looked like. He had seen it through the tele-screen of the Hardacre missile and he may well also have seen pictures or heard descriptions of it.

The teller was in no hurry to attend to the cadaverous tramp who peered at him from nervously darting pale blue eyes but went on tapping the keys of his calculator as though there was nobody there. Pretty soon there wasn't for Bendon Hardacre stayed only for as long as was necessary. Apart from the fact that there was a dark hole where a part of the shelf behind the teller had been, and that the shoulder of the teller's coat gaped to reveal the plastoyarn shirt until then covered by the outer fabric—for the focussing was as accurate as that—there was nothing to show that one of the most ingenious of recorded Bank robberies had just taken place.

The kerfluffle that ensued when the loss of the money was eventually discovered kept the local newscast in headlines for days for luck had changed, in a way, for Bendon Hardacre, and he had chosen a day when incoming new notes and outgoing old notes had been stacked side by side. 100,000 Sonars that ought to have been safely in the Bank weren't, and the black hole was searched in vain. But that is really not part of the story.

As he shuffled his ragged way homeward—pathveyors did not reach Linesend until a year or so later—Bendon Hardacre's heart must have been singing a song of bliss. There are again a few townsfolk who vouched that they had directed him to his own street and, of

these, two who knew him by sight recall distinctly how startled they were to see the man smiling: at least his lips were parted in a vulpine grin and the gleam which had lain for so long in his eyes showed even brighter. He certainly had good and sufficient reason for joy. An awkward job had been carried out to perfection and there was the added pleasure of knowing that the focussing device which, he had noted, had given him so much trouble, had worked faultlessly. Probably for the first time in his life he was happy, although it is equally likely that he misconstrued the sensation and determined to get a meal in somehow during the next few days.

There is no way of telling exactly what happened during the twenty-four hours following Bendon Hardacre's return to the Shed. We can, perhaps, obtain some inkling of the helpless fury that must have burned in the man as he realised in a flash of unusual clarity that fate had dealt him another, and, as it proved, final, blow. But we cannot know. What is certain is that at about 1500 hours on the following afternoon the neighbours on either side of the Hardacre residence saw the hermit executing strange manoeuvres on the 'plot.' Number 51 described the sight as 'something I'll never forget in all me natural. Stark he was and crooning fit to bust.' Number 49, better travelled, compared Bendon's activities to the 'exotic screaming dance of the Vlotkan natives.' (Vlotka Island, Crabheim's Archipelago, Venus Solar).

Within a few minutes an ambulance had touched down in the street and the three attendants were just in time to stop Bendon firing the house. He fled at their approach and took refuge in the place that probably meant more to him than anywhere else—the Shed. Had they known the devices he had at his disposal they would no doubt have hesitated before entering, but they went straight in and found Bendon Hardacre cowering behind one of the work benches. He said nothing then and offered no resistance.

For the few further facts of the Hardacre story I am indebted to one of the two attendants who remained with him while the third returned to the ambulance to report to Rest 13 and to fetch a plastro-wrap. The attendant's deposition makes interesting, and enlightening, reading. "He didn't seem to like us being there, kept glaring quietly, so I started to look round. I found that black box on a bench, rather like an old fashioned camera it looked, so I picked it up." He wiped his brow although the moment belonged so far in the past. "If I'd known, of course, I wouldn't have gone near the thing. As it was I aimed at the first-aid bag which I'd placed on a crate and pressed a little lever, without thinking what I was doing really." He paused again. "Well, the bag and the crate and a lot of papers that were on

it, and a bit of the floor and the lower part of the wall behind just disappeared. You can imagine how I felt. I looked at Joe and Joe looked at me and I put the thing down gently like it was a bomb. Even then we didn't guess what it was, and before we could do anything we heard a whimpering noise and there was this Hardacre shaking his fist at us.

"I think for the next few moments he was perfectly sane, in an insane sort of way if you understand me. He looked at us and his eyes were not quite so fever-bright. I can tell you the very words he used, although they didn't make sense at the time.

"He spoke slowly as though we were kids. 'I had to build one or the other,' he said, 'I had enough for one and nothing more. I built the transmitter to get money so that I could build the receiver. I perceive now the error. I should have built the receiver first.'"

Official action followed swiftly on the mens' report and all three attendants were sworn to secrecy. At that particular time, it will be recalled, such an invention was rather more than a national asset.

It is idle to speculate just what plans for further amazing inventions went to join the money when the ambulance man flicked the lever of the Hardacre matter-transmitter for Bendon joined the rest of his family within a month or so. We can only be thankful that the blueprint for the receiver was not among them. It is equally useless to wish that he could have brought himself to sell or share his inventions, or at least to tell some one of his predicament but he was psychologically incapable of doing any of these things.

By the way, there is still a reward for that 100,000 Sonars but whoever manages to call them back will get an awful lot of junk as well.

—Richard Rowland.

Rising Costs

We regret the increased price of *Science Fantasy* as from this issue, which is to offset the increased production costs and to give you still better material for your reading pleasure.

In the following story one of Britain's most popular science fiction writers offers a particular gruesome but logical explanation to that popular quotation "ghoulies and ghosties . . . and things that go bump in the night."

I HEAR YOU CALLING

By ERIC FRANK RUSSELL

A frightened town, dark and deadly. A minor name on a vast map. Formerly noteworthy for nothing save the idle rumour that a flying saucer had landed nearby. That had been a month ago and proved baseless. Police and pressmen scoured the outskirts. No saucer.

This event faded, lost significance as hunters took off in pursuit of something else, something weightier and more urgent that cleared the streets by night. On the main stem a few dusty, neglected neons glowed over empty bars while cops lurked in shadowy doorways, watched cats playing leapfrog and jumping low.

Widgey Bullock knew nothing of this. To him the town had its virtues. That was why he had just arrived there. It was forty miles from port, devoid of naval patrols, officers, pickpockets and the same old bunch of painted trollops. A new landfall. A place where a naval

stoker first-class could roll the boat without getting tossed into the brig.

Entering a likely bar, he shoved his pork-pie on to the back of his head, said, "I'm in the mood, Mac. Give me an Atom Bomb."

"What might that be?" inquired the barman. He was a fat sample, pasty-faced with too little sun, too little sleep.

"I should have to tell you?" Widgey hitched his lean bulk on a stool, rubbed blue jowls. "Equal parts rum, tequila and vodka. Add a pinch of red pepper and shake."

"God!" said the other. He slopped it together, vibrated it, slid it across. Then he watched warily as if awaiting the mushroom cloud.

Widgey poured some down. He twitched his scalp and the cap jerked with it.

"What a joint," he commented, staring around. "No juke-box, no dames, no company, nobody but you and me. Where's everybody?"

"Home," said the barman. He nodded toward the wall-clock. "Ten thirty and it's dark."

"Mean to say the town's closed down?" Widgey tipped the cap over his eyes, stared incredulously. "Ten thirty's the time for things to start livening up. The place should get jumping around midnight."

"Not here," said the barman. His gaze drifted toward the door, came back. He didn't seem to know what might enter next but obviously didn't want it, not at any price.

"What's wrong with here?" demanded Widgey, ignoring the door.

"Folk are getting themselves killed."

"How's that? Somebody feuding?"

"They just lie around dead," said the barman. "Dead and empty."

"Empty?"

"No blood," said the barman.

"Give me another," Widgey ordered, poking his glass. He got it, took a deep gulp, coughed with the fire of it. "Now let's have this straight. Who's being killed?"

"One here, one there," the other said. "Mostly strangers."

"I'm a stranger myself," Widgey pointed out. "Does that put me on the list?"

"Wouldn't be surprised."

"What a dump!" Widgey complained. "Forty miles I come for bright lights and freedom. What do I get? A hick town heading for bed and a barkeep measuring my corpse."

"Sorry," said the other. "But you might as well know." He waved a hand to emphasise the sheer emptiness of the place. "This is just the way it's been every night for the last three weeks. When I

go home I keep close by the wall and wear my eyes in my pants the whole way. I keep my door locked twice over."

"How many," asked Widgey, "have been laid and emptied?"

"Twelve so far. Next one will be number thirteen."

"What are the cops doing about it?"

"Looking," said the barman. "What else can they do?"

"This sounds like a bar-yarn to me," observed Widgey, suspiciously.

"Are you figuring on getting rid of me and shutting shop early?"

"Dead wrong," the barman told him. "It's all in the papers. A dry stiff every other night." He eyed the door again. "Besides, I can't close up when I like and I need the company."

"I'll say you do," Widgey assured. "Fellow your weight will have buckets of blood. You're a major target."

"Shut up!" said the barman, looking sick.

"I'm not worrying," Widgey went on. "Just one night here and back to the ship tomorrow. After that, you can have this lousy town and welcome." He took a long swig, smacked his lips. "Know of any other joint where there'd be more than two of us?"

"No. Not at this time."

"Well, d'you know of an address where I can knock three times and ask for Mabel?"

"What do you think I am?" asked the barman, frowning.

"I think you ought to know your way around seeing this is your own stamping ground."

"It isn't mine. I've been here only a couple of months." He wiped the back of his neck, peered toward the street. "That's what scares me. I rank as a stranger too."

"Take it easy," Widgey advised. "When you're dead and empty you won't know it even if you look like a slack sack." He poked the glass again. "Make it a double. If you can't give me an address I'll have to do without. Maybe I can drink myself beyond what I have in mind."

At eleven forty the barman said, "Any more you'd better take with you. This is where I shut shop."

Widgey pointed to a yellow bottle. "I'll take that." He fumbled clumsily in a pocket, dug out money and paid. A couple of coins fell to the floor. He teetered as he picked them up.

"It's working on you," said the barman.

"Which is all that is," said Widgey.

Pocketing the bottle he rolled out with a decided list to starboard. The street was a mess of greys and blacks, the neons gone. A thin sliver of moon rode above bulging clouds.

He headed uncertainly for the crummy hotel where he'd booked a room. A leering tomcat slunk across his path, wanting the same as he did. Hidden in the dark entrance to an alley a policeman watched his passing, made no sound to betray his presence. On the other side of the road a woman hurried along, wary and fearful.

"Hi, Babe!" he hoarsed across, not caring whether she were hot or cold, young or old.

She broke into a near-run, her heels making a fast and urgent *clop-clop*. Widgey stood watching her and swearing under his breath. The policeman emerged from the alley, kept an eye on both of them. The woman stopped two hundred yards down, frantically stabbed a key at a door, went into a house. The slam of the door sounded like the crack of doom.

"Bet they say their prayers, too," scoffed Widgey.

Alcoholically aggrieved, he lurched onward, found the hotel, climbed upstairs. Savagely he flung his cap across the room, pulled off his jacket and shied it the same way, kicked his shoes under the bed. He spent a minute examining himself in the mirror over the washbasin, pawing his ears and making faces at himself. Then he went to the window and looked out at the night.

There was another woman on the road below. She drifted along in a strange, unhurried manner, an undulating glide like that of a column of grey smoke wafted by a gentle breeze. She was blurry as if draped and veiled. A lot of things look blurry when a man has heavy cargo under the hatches.

But a woman is a woman. One who travels late and without haste is always a good prospect, thought Widgey. Slipping the catch, he opened the window and leaned out. No cops were visible. Nobody but the vague figure.

"Yoohoo!"

It achieved nothing. Perhaps she hadn't heard.

"Yoohoo!"

The figure stopped. Moonlight was too poor to show which way she was looking but at least her halt was encouraging.

"YOOHOO!" bawled Widgey, bending farther out and throwing discretion to the winds. He waved an energetic arm.

The figure made a vague gesture, crossed the road toward the hotel. Closing the window, Widgey delightedly tried a slow soft shoe routine but his balance had gone to pot. Seas were rough tonight.

He left his door a couple of inches ajar so she would know which room was which. Hurriedly he cleaned a couple of glasses by sloshing water around them, put them on the bedside table along with the yellow bottle.

A timid knock sounded.

"Come in!" He spat on his hands, used them to brush back his hair, fixed a welcoming grin on his face.

The knocker came in.

Widgey backed away fast, then more slowly as strength flowed out of his legs. His grin had vanished and he's gone cold sober in one-fifth of a second. He wanted to yell bloody murder but couldn't emit a squeak.

The edge of the bed caught behind his retreating knees. He flopped backward, lay on the bed with chest and throat exposed. He couldn't do a thing to save himself, not a damn thing.

It glided soundlessly to the bedside, bent over and looked at him with eyes that were black pinheads set deeply in green fluff. Its long, elastic mouth came out and pouted like the nozzle of a fire-hose. The last that Widgey ever heard was a whisper from a million miles away.

"I am Yuhu. You called me."

—Eric Frank Russell.

If wishes could make things come true the relative values of the world would disappear. 'The Tooth' was a means of wish-fulfilment—it didn't belong to Earth at all—but luckily, more by accident than design, it was put to the best possible use.

THE TOOTH

By G. GORDON DEWEY

To-day

"With these?" Raul Alvarez held up the two bandaged stumps where his hands had been—stumps ending halfway between wrist and elbow. "These? Surely you are—"

"Joking?" The nurse laughed a little tinkling laugh. It was what she was learning to expect. The shocked incredulity in the renowned pianist's voice echoed those who had preceded him to The Tooth.

"No, Senor Alvarez," she said, still with the laugh in her voice, as though she had her own amusing little secret. "It is not a joke. All the people who—live here—will be in the auditorium within the hour. You are scheduled to play a piano concert."

"But Senorita"—and again he held up the pitiful stumps where the famous hands had been—"you cannot but be joking—and a very poor joke, surely. With my own eyes I saw—my hands, lying there beneath the train, where I fell. I tried to pick them up . . ." His expressive Latin face contorted in pain at the recollection. Then, "Someone must notify the station. I was to broadcast at eight."

"Then you must not delay. Eight o'clock in New York, is not far off." The girl's hand under his arm was persuasively gentle. "Come with me, Senor Alvarez," she said, softly, no laughter in her voice now. "You shall see. Within the hour you'll play as you've never



played before. With your own hands!" She added, reassuringly, "The radio station is standing by, in New York, and your broadcast will be on schedule."

They went down the corridor and an elevator took them to a lower floor. At the end of a short, straight hall a massive, vault-like door sighed open before them.

There was only one man in the room. He was white-coated, but with no smell of antiseptics about him. He looked up, smiled. "Over here, if you please," he said, and led the handless pianist to a small table in the centre of the room. Seated snugly in a latticed metal framework on the table was an ovoid, unfaceted red crystal, held in an upright position.

Came the snip snip of scissors, and the doctor began to remove the bandages. Alvarez looked helplessly at the nurse as the red raw stumps of his arms came into view, wincing when stuck gauze pulled loose from unhealed flesh.

The doctor tossed the bandages aside, smiled confidently. "Hold out your arms before you," he said, placing his hand on the musician's shoulder. "Look at them—concentrate . . . Visualize, see them as they were, with your own hands there, in all their strength and skill and supply dexterity. Just so!"

Alvarez raised awed eyes to the nurse. Her tinkling laugh rang out again.

"You are due in the auditorium, Senor Alvarez," she said. "I'll show you where it is."

Yesterday

Screaming through the tortured stratosphere, the multiple-rocket-driven ship melted the miles between it and The Tooth. For Brand McClain, seated at the controls, it was the first trip. He glanced aside at veteran pilot Rodney Grace, making his last haul on a Saviour Ship. Too old—he was 28. Still okay for rocket drives, but only younger men were allowed to pilot a ship into The Tooth.

"Do you always notch them to the limit and hold it there?" McClain asked, indicating a dial on the low panel before him. "Forty-five hundred m.p.h.—I've ridden some rocket blasts, but this . . ."

Grace grunted. "When we carry cargo, we pick 'em up and lay 'em down." He squinted into the rosy dusk of the western sky before them. "'Dj'ever see the sun come up in the west?"

McClain grinned. "No, but I've seen it set in the east."

"Same thing," growled Grace.

McClain nodded down toward the nose of the ship. "Who we bringin' in?"

"Some musician. Fellow name of Alvarez. Slipped and fell, in the station, just in time for a train to come along and take off his hands."

"I've heard the guy play—one of the best. Too bad . . ."

Grace cocked an eyebrow at the younger man. "Save the tears," he grunted. "Don't tell me you never heard about The Tooth!"

McClain had heard. But only the general things. He knew that The Tooth is a great ovoid building, 1000 feet high, 700 feet through, set down in the middle of a barren Arizona desert. Designed for living, it was planned so that as many people as possible might fit into a given space, have room to live and work, and enjoy the sun from its setback terraces and roof gardens.

It is a city in itself, self-supporting, self-providing. The nearest house is ten miles distant, the nearest town, fifteen. Power plant and other installations necessary to the operation of the building itself as a machine for living are in a great basement, below the floor of the desert, and outside what is regarded as the vital dimensions of the building.

In the exact geometric centre of the functional part of The Tooth is a small room, windowless, and with only a single entrance, a heavy laminated-steel door, which is merely an extension of its thick, tough, armour-plate walls. In the centre of this room is a table. On the centre of the table is a firmly-anchored little framework in which rests a curious red crystalline ovoid . . .

A famous painter works there in The Tooth, living there, doing his canvasses with eyes guiding hands that form the compositions with the sheer perfection of colour values for which he is world-renowned. With his paintings again flowing out of the world, few people remember, and then only vaguely, the story of the tragic accident that cost him both his eyes.

And the greatest of all mathematical philosophers is there, still thinking in dimensions and time streams and equations beyond the comprehension of ordinary men. There is not even a scar to mark the spot where the falling roof tile crashed into the frontal lobes of his brain, turning him from savant to idiot.

There are others. Not many, yet—but they come. Two things are required of prospective patient-inhabitants. Their work must have been beneficial to the world, so that without them people are deprived of something. And they must have lost parts, or the use of parts, of their body which are vital to their work. An artist without eyes to see and hands to guide the brush is welcome; but an artist who has lost a leg cannot gain admittance.

The Tooth? Only two people, so it went, know why it is called that. And they aren't particularly communicative on the subject.

Against the golden glowing sky reared up a huge black egg, growing, growing . . .

"Where do we land?" McClain reached for the throttle to reduce speed.

"Aim dead on that bright spot in the centre of the building. The drive will cut automatically."

"What kind of field is it?" asked the younger man as he cut the throttle.

"Wait'll we land. You've never seen anything like it. Near as I can figure it they got this landing tube built right in to the centre of the building. Just ease right into it. Make a routine landing."

The ship slanted slowly to the ground, McClain cut in the auxiliaries and at the end of the field the ship rolled toward a black mouth of a tunnel. As they entered, the tube lit up, Grace braked to a stop before a white wall. Before they were out of their seats a door opened in a wall and white-coated attendants were reaching for the rubber-wheeled stretcher carrying the still form of Paul Alvarez and rolling it smoothly forward to the brilliantly lighted room beyond the door.

Last Week

The ship news reporter went over the passenger list again; then tipping his hat farther back on his head he lit a cigarette and stared accusingly at the purser. The purser shrugged, spread his hands in mute denial.

"Look," the reporter said. "Look, now. They gotta be on this ship. You sure you don't know about them? Under another name maybe?"

"Five times you've asked me that! There's nobody like them people on board. No Mr. and Mrs. Michael O'Loy have booked passage with us."

"I got it straight," the reporter said. "They're starting out for around the world today. This is the only ship heading out of New York harbour for a world cruise . . ."

"Never heard of them."

"Sure you have. They're the restaurant people who made a fortune over night, then sold out. Then they turned up missing for a week, and next thing they were out in Arizona with 10,000 workmen putting up a big hospital in the desert."

"Oh, them."

Across the Hudson a small freighter was pulling out from a wharf at Weehauken. The harbour pilot was handling the ship in the river, grumpily complaining to the captain that he would have to get off at the Light, and let the ship go on to its warm Mediterranean ports, with "even passengers this time!"

"Sure," the captain agreed. "We've got one cabin for passengers, but we don't often get them. It's young Mike O'Loy and his pretty wife, heading out to see the world. Nice kids." He looked toward the rail.

Dusk was over the river and the sun had dipped behind the Palisades. The couple at the rail stood arm in arm, watching as the lights of the city became ever brighter and more numerous.

"You're right, honey," the man said. "This is the way to do it. We've made some money, enough to enjoy ourselves on. No use being greedy."

"We've done some good for the world, too, Mike—The Tooth. I'm sure we have. Maybe it will make up for some of the things we've done that weren't so good—if the score ever gets added up."

He held her closely and spoke reassuringly. "We weren't dishonest, Helen. Well, not exactly. I guess there's lots of people in the world would have done a lot worse than we did . . . Let's forget it for awhile, though. This is our first honeymoon—remember?"

Helen squeezed his arm and her voice was round and firm again. "It's been like a honeymoon," she told him, "the whole two years of being married to you."

Three Months Ago

The seven came to the end of their inspection tour in the kitchen. There were mutterings among them as they looked around the room, but it was Carter who put it into words. Rubbing a moist fat palm over his bald head, he said, speaking in his shrill whine.

"It's not big enough. It couldn't be done, that's all. You can't cook for 1,200 people in a place this size. Besides, where's the equipment?"

Saunders was looking around, as puzzled as the rest of them, but prepared to be on the defensive. "Look," he said, "you knew this. I told you before we went through with the deal. The O'Loys wouldn't sell the kitchen fixtures. They said they'd take what they wanted. Anything they left, we could have." He waved his arm in a circular gesture. "This is it."

"Sure," whined Carter. "Sure. But like I say, it's just not big enough. Besides, where was the equipment?" He waved a pudgy hand. "They got a refrigerator here, and a big oven, sure; and a big mixing machine. But where's all the rest of the stuff? They used gas plates, maybe?"

The other men looked around the bare walls with trained eyes. Kitchen equipment that was used for a while left traces of where it had been, even after it was moved. They were all convinced that there had never been any other things in that kitchen except what was here right now. Maybe you could make a few cakes with this stuff, but how could you serve 1,200 people from here? The answer was easy: It couldn't be done. But the O'Loys had done it . . .

"Look," said Saunders. "We're all right. We'll come out all right. We'll make this kitchen larger, add a pantry. We got a nice

building and we got the name. The Magic Kitchen is known all over the country now. We'll run this as a syndicate, like we planned, and each keep up his own restaurant on his own."

"We sure paid plenty for this."

"Okay. We paid plenty. So the kitchen's screwy. We were lucky they'd sell, that's all. That kind of competition was murder!"

Four Months Ago

It had been touch and go on the kitchen equipment for awhile. The restaurant itself was all right—Saunders could see at a glance that the furnishings were in good shape. He couldn't get over the feeling, though, that there was more here than met the eye. He turned purposively toward the kitchen.

"Mind if I take a look?" he said.

"It doesn't matter," Mike O'Loy insisted, stepping quickly in front of him. "I told you we're not selling the kitchen fixtures. The price is for the rest of the place—and any stuff we feel like leaving behind."

"That don't make sense, O'Loy," Saunders countered. "Like I say, the sales contract has gotta say you stay out of the food business for the next seven years. What good will the stuff be to you?"

Helen spoke up then. "Call it sentiment, Mr. Saunders. Perhaps we want to furnish our own kitchen with the things from here."

Saunders shook his head. "A private house with enough cooking stuff for more than 1000 people?"

Mike shrugged. "That's the way it is, Saunders."

Saunders stood staring at the O'Loys blocking his way to the kitchen. Something sure must be funny in there. He'd like to put over a bluff.

He didn't quite have the nerve. He couldn't go back to the others and tell them he'd let the deal blow up. Besides, he was in the same spot as the rest of them with his back already to the wall. He couldn't keep on cutting prices to meet Magic Kitchen prices—that kind of competition was ruinous. He was losing business, too; would go on losing business.

The price was steep, but he knew the others would back him up. They had no choice. "Okay," he sighed in capitulation. "It's a deal. I'll have my lawyer draw up the papers first thing in the morning"

Mike held the sigh of relief until Saunders was gone. Then he began breathing deeply again and watched Helen uncross two painfully laced fingers.

"That's it, Helen. That's it."

"Yes, Mike . . . Mike—"

"No, Helen. They're getting what they're paying for. No more, no less. It's up to them to make a go of it. Maybe Saunders is suspicious, but all the second guessing in the world won't get them anywhere."

Six Months Ago

"I never thought I'd wait in line to eat at any restaurant," the woman complained. "Why, there must be 500 people still ahead of us!"

"Now, Martha," her husband said soothingly, "the line's moving right along. We'll be in before you know it."

"If it wasn't that everybody was talking about the O'Loys and their wonderful new restaurant, and all, I wouldn't be here, I'll tell you."

The line moved smoothly on, and before long Martha and her patient husband stepped through the doors of the Magic Kitchen. Then Martha forgot her recent annoyance.

It was a huge place, seating at least 1,200 people at a time, high-ceilinged, clean looking, well lighted. There was the smell of good food in the air, and there was a look of cosy satisfaction on the faces of those who were leaving, their meals eaten.

As they moved on toward the ordering desk, Martha was struck by the look of keen anticipation on the face of the old gentleman, white of hair and neatly-trimmed beard, who preceded them.

"It was many years ago," he said, musingly, to the pleasant, smiling young woman behind the desk, "when last I dined . . . It is said that one may order what one desires?"

"That is correct."

His eyes closed, and the look of anticipation dissolved into one of sheer ecstasy. "I had not dared to dream," he whispered. And then he began to order.

Martha tried to follow it—he spoke slowly, savouring each dish as he named it—but none of them sounded like anything she'd ever heard of before.

". . . huitres sur coquilles de Neptun . . . consomme aux oeufs de Leda . . . perche a la Meduse Divine . . . filet de boeuf a l'Hercule Antique . . ."

And there was more, much more. He mentioned wines and cordials with the very flavour of antiquity in their names, and there was an overtone almost of reverence in his voice as he named them: ". . . Amontillado '57 . . . Rudesheimer Berg . . . Chateau Yquem . . . Chablis Vieux . . ."

And now the smiling young woman had turned to them, her pencil poised expectantly.

"May I have your orders, please?"

"We haven't seen a menu yet," Martha reminded her sharply.

The young woman continued to smile. "No menus, Madam. Just order whatever you desire."

"How do we know what they cost?"

"One dollar a person, Madam, regardless of what you have."

For once in her life Martha felt inadequate as she ordered, ransacking her memory for favourite dishes. Sea food cocktail. Tomato juice, Avocada and fruit salad. Pheasant and bacon. Mashed potatoes. Green peas. Cold lobster on the side. Baked Alaska. Coffee. Cordial

The young woman added the husband's order for bear steak and French fries, collected their money, and gave them their table assignment. They were scarcely seated when a waiter appeared with silverware and water, platters heaped with butter, and a huge covered dish.

When he had gone Martha lifted the lid gingerly. "Biscuits!" she snorted. "Well, I don't intend to fill up on biscuits!"

Her husband was hungrier. He broke one open, filled it with butter, popped it absent-mindedly into his mouth. He bit down, looked puzzled, and then his tired face beamed in delight. He started buttering another while Martha watched him suspiciously.

"Try one, Martha. You've never tasted . . ." Whatever he had planned to say was cut off as he began the second biscuit.

"Better than mine?" Martha's tone and expression were challenging.

"Try one!"

"Well, all right—but I'm not going to let them spoil my dinner."

A few minutes later the waiter returned with their dinners, removed the empty biscuit dish, and put their food before them.

It was just as they had ordered: good solid food. Nothing fancy about it, but superbly prepared. Its savoury odours made Martha's mouth water. And as she finished one course of her meal, the empty dishes were removed and the next one, with silently swift efficiency, was served. The freshness of it would have challenged her in her own home. Incredibly, she realised, the chef must be timing thousands of different dishes so that they were being placed before hundreds of diners at the exact moment that both diner and food were ready.

"It's impossible," Martha told her husband on the way out. "Edward, I know something about preparing food, as you well know. That meal was absolutely wonderful. But do you realise we got it only a few minutes after we ordered it? It just isn't possible."

"Volume does it, Martha. Big turnover."

"Maybe. But I still don't see how they could possibly have ready to serve anything a body could ask for. Anyway, we're going to eat here again."

"Even if we have to stand in line?"

"It didn't hurt you, Edward."

They were outside now, on the sidewalk, strolling along, sluggish, feeling the heaviness of their dinners.

Then, suddenly, the sensation of being stuffed was gone. There was only the feeling of having had a delicious dinner, one that left them with a pleasant warming glow.

"The food wasn't heavy, either, Edward. I feel very comfortable . . . We'll eat here again tomorrow night—if we come earlier maybe we won't have to stand in line so long."

Nine Months Ago

"It must be good for something, Helen." Mike O'Loy was arguing with himself as much as with his wife. "The wonder of the age. Or of all history, or something. Lord, if we can't make something out of this we're awful chumps."

"Like what, Mike?" The fond smile on his wife's face put him somehow on the defensive. He knew what she was thinking—that sure, Mike would want to make something of it. That it was only a toy, really, but Mike had to have his technicolour dreams.

Mike ran fingers through touselled hair and shook his head. "I don't know. It's driving me nuts. There must be something—there has to be!"

"You've thought of almost everything, darling. None of the ideas would work out."

Mike shook his head stubbornly. "All my life I've just missed, all along the line. Maybe it's me . . . maybe it's just the breaks. I have a good job in California, so we get married three weeks ago. Next day, no job.

"So we head back to New York to live in your brother's house while he's in South America. I get a job here right away. Everything looks fine. Then that job blows up. Everything blows up. And here we are with this, and there's a fortune in it somewhere, and I can't figure it out. Now I'm ready to blow up!"

"Mike, get me a glass of lemonade, please."

"Hunh?" Sure." Mike quit pacing the floor and went over to the table in the centre of the room.

The table was empty except for a small square of black felt. Lying on the felt was a small red ovoid. Mike stared at it wonderingly. It

was almost like a ruby to the eyes, and you could look far into the depths of it, as though gazing into unthinkable distance. But the feel of it was that of hard metal, cold; colder than it should be, and as unyielding.

With a start he recalled the lemonade, concentrated on the mental image of it. A tall glass of lemonade appeared on the table beside the felt pad. He picked it up and handed it to Helen, feeling the coldness of it as he did so. Ice tinkled against the side of the glass.

Smiling, Helen accepted the lemonade. "It's wonderful just this way, Mike. We can have anything we want, when we want it."

"Within reason, I guess . . . We could open a lemonade stand, and—Helen! Why not a restaurant? We could serve anything in the world, on a moment's notice."

Helen shook her head reprovingly. "Not that, Mike. If you're going to feed people, you've got to feed them. Not just give them something that's good to taste, like cotton candy."

"Yeah, I suppose so." Mike stared absently at his right hand, still damp from the frostiness of the glass. He started to rub his hand against his shirt to dry it.

"Mike, your finger!"

"Hey?" He glanced up quickly. Eyes sparkling, Helen was pointing to his little finger, the one with the missing joint.

"See if The Tooth will replace your finger!"

"Aw, it wouldn't . . ."

"Try it!"

The excited urgency in Helen's voice was contagious. Mike walked back to the table and put his hand down beside the red stone, staring fixedly at the place where the rest of the finger should be.

When he held up his hand again the finger was whole, bending as he wished it to bend, behaving as a normal finger should behave. There was no line nor trace to show the juncture of old with new. He pinched the brand new tip, experimentally, then grimaced. "It hurts," he said. "Hurts just like the real thing."

"That's something we'll keep in mind. Maybe there's a use . . ."

"I got it." Grasping his wife's shoulders, Mike shook her excitedly. "I got it! I got it!"

"Unhand me, gorilla. Got what?"

"Look, darling. You can make the best biscuits in the whole wide world. Can you make them even better? Lots of them? Thousands of them? Millions? Zillions?"

"Slow down, bub—you're racing your motor. Why?"

"If you can, we're in! Could you chock them full of vitamins and iron and hormones and amino acids and all those things? So they'd be nutritious and still delicious?"

"Yes . . . I suppose so. I guess I could."

"We'll open a restaurant. We'll start out with a small place, then grow."

"Mike—"

"It's all right. We'll let the customers order anything they want. Give them biscuits while they're waiting. Biscuits they won't be able to resist eating. They'll be filling, and provide all the nourishment a person needs. The biscuits alone will be worth what we charge for the rest of the meal."

"I don't know. It doesn't seem—I hope you're right . . ."

Ten Months Ago

It had been easy to get a job, easier to lose it. Just in from California, they were settled, for a while, in Helen's brother's house. Mike had felt like tackling the world again.

But that Saturday afternoon he took his time getting home from work. It wouldn't be fun telling Helen.

Not that it was his fault. A slump in business, and the newest employees got the axe.

Helen was in the back of the house when he came in. Mike could hear her singing—that made it worse. He decided to shower and shave and change his clothes before telling her. Maybe he'd feel more like facing her then.

In the bedroom he stopped in amazement, looking at the bed. Then he walked over to it slowly, telling himself he was seeing things.

It was a new suit—powder-blue gabardine and double-breasted, exactly as he'd been wanting. He held it up, figured it would fit him well enough despite the somewhat unusual cut, then replaced it carefully on the bed.

And new shoes, the kind he always wore. A new hat. New underclothing. Shirt and socks and tie. Even suspenders—and a finely-made wallet with a crisp new \$10 bill in it!

He picked up the wrist watch reverently. The band was of flexible gold links. The dial was large and golden-black, with lots of luminous figures and hands.

He held himself back with an effort. He wouldn't rush downstairs yet. He wouldn't ask who had left her a million dollars. He'd shave with the new electric razor, take a shower, dress in the new clothes, then go downstairs casually, pausing perhaps to light a cigarette with the new lighter. As though it were nothing at all. Cool and calm. Collected.

He was half shaved when he hit the bottom of the stairs, yelling her name ! Helen appeared from the kitchen, looking very innocent, valiantly smothering a grin.

" Kiss me ! " he shouted. " Tell me ! What happened? Who died? Tell me quick ! "

Helen exploded into laughter. Words finally came through, as she wiped tears from her eyes. " I wanted to see if it would polish—"

Mike spluttered. " What would polish?"

" Oh. The Tooth. I had it out today—"

" Tooth?" Mike stared in astonishment. " What tooth?"

" I'm trying to tell you. Remember when you were a kid?—and a tooth came out, and you put it under your pillow, and next morning you'd find a . . . "

" Dime ! Sure. What tooth?"

" That little red oval thing we found in the desert, on the way from the Coast."

" What? Oh, that . . . But—"

" Mike darling, listen. I was polishing it and thinking about that wrist watch you wanted so badly—and there it was ! "

" This watch? Where?"

" Right there on the table, silly. Then I wished for some more things and there they were ! Right beside the Tooth. I mean, that red crystal. Then I found out I didn't have to rub it. Just make a wish for something and there it was. Like Aladdin's Lamp, only no hard rubbing, no scrubbing, no dishpan hands, no smoky giant."

Mike reached for the crystal ovoid. " Let me try that thing," he growled.

It was just like Helen said. Wish for a thing, and there it was, as perfect and solid as could be. Before he was thoroughly convinced that there seemed to be no limit to what the crystal could provide, the floor was covered with the fruits of his desires.

" This is better than an inheritance," he exalted. " Let's whip out some more of those \$10 bills and go out for the evening."

" No, Mike. That would be counterfeiting."

" But you—"

" No. That's a real one in your wallet. Our last one. It wouldn't be right to make money."

" Guess not. Helen, I don't mind telling you now, I'm out of work again."

She didn't mind much, still too excited over her discoveries. " It's okay, Mike. Let's get dressed and go out to dinner."

" New clothes for you, too?"

"No, I don't think so. Just you. I'll wear that blue dress—I've never had it on, and I got it to celebrate in."

"Okay, baby. Let's get going."

Sure, he felt like a new man when they left the house a little later. New clothes, new confidence, and a pretty young wife on his arm.

They decided to walk, leaving the car in the garage. It was a velvety evening, and walking felt good. They'd have a good dinner, take in a show, then come back to their Tooth which Helen had tucked under the pillow of their bed, and see if they could figure out a use for it.

They were a little over 300 feet from the house when Mike felt the chill of the evening. It hadn't seemed that cool when they started. And the sidewalk was suddenly cold, as though he were barefoot. He clutched at something fluttering before him, caught it, and stared at a \$10 bill.

"Now it's raining money," he muttered. He heard Helen gasp beside him—and was suddenly conscious of his nudity!

He stood there for an instant, looking down at his bare skin. Everything was gone! Everything but the \$10 bill he'd plucked out of the air.

The little neighbourhood grocery was closed for the evening. Mike ducked into its doorway. He stood there, feeling the perspiration break out on him. Fortunately it was dark in the store, reasonably dark in the entrance.

Helen came in after him, removing her coat and holding it out to him. He slipped it over his bare shoulders gratefully, thankful for some covering.

"I'll go get the car and pick you up," Helen said, as she turned and hurried away. Mike started to call her back. After all, there was nothing for her to be crying about. Then he recognised the sounds she was making, and he felt his face flaming in the darkness. There was nothing to be laughing about either.

Back at the house Mike dressed in his own more worn clothes. His face was grim as he picked up a handful of his wish-products of earlier in the evening and carried them from the house.

Helen was waiting in the porch when he returned, empty-handed. He loaded up again and set out in the other direction. Again he returned empty-handed.

Then he sat on the couch and stared at the ceiling. Helen came over and held his hand, resting her head against his shoulder.

At last Mike sighed. "It's a good trick, honey," he said. "While it lasts. But once I get about 300 feet or so away from the house—Foop! Everything your Tooth makes just turns into thin air . . . Very thin air!"

Eleven Months Ago

It was somewhere in Arizona. Before they left California they counted their money, made sure they had enough for gas and oil and possible car repairs. Then they bought food enough to see them across the country. They would have to sleep in the car to meet their budget.

On all sides of them, to the horizon and beyond, was nothing but desert—and here they had their first flat tyre. It was a warm day, hot enough, but not too hot. While Mike tackled the job of changing tyres Helen set out to explore the near vicinity.

The tyre was almost changed when Mike heard her call, "Mike ! Oh, Mike !"

Alarmed by something in the sound of her voice, a sort of frightened urgency, Mike dropped his tools and sprinted. He found her on the other side of the car, twenty yards from the road, staring at a group of rabbits.

Or something like rabbits—they weren't right rabbits. There was something wrong, something distorted about them. They were big in front, tapering toward the back, as though they, and not the viewer, had perspective. Built-in perspective ! Their legs were shorter than those on the rabbits he remembered seeing, and they were fatter and plumper than wild rabbits had a right to be. And all of them were converging slowly toward . . .

He forgot the rabbits when he saw the snake ! He'd always thought of rattlesnakes as thin, vicious strings of lightning. This one was almost a parody of a rattlesnake. Everything about it suggested laziness, good humour, and good living. It was fat, even without the bulge of the rabbit in its middle. It did not seem to want the rabbit that was moving slowly toward it, and its strike was sluggish and impotent.

"Don't move," he commanded softly. "That fellow looks slow right now, but he can still move fast if he has to."

He went back to the car after the pistol he kept in the sidepocket, and only the back of his mind worried about the snake and the feeding system it seemed to have worked out with the rabbits.

The pistol bucked, and the snake's shattered head slumped limply to the sand. A few feet from its writhing coils Helen found the small egg-shaped crystal lying half-buried in the sand. She picked it up, admired the redness of it against the brown of her hand, then dropped it into her jacket pocket. It might not be anything valuable, but it was odd, and it was pretty.

Last Year

There had been a long silence between the two creatures. Neither of them seemed willing to bring the matter up again. At last the more sinuous of them spoke.

"We're beyond their asteroids now. You can cut in the interstellar drive.

His companion arched toward the control board, depressed still further a sparkling pink concavity. Both felt the strain of the instant acceleration before the compensator could nullify it. Behind them the sun dwindled.

The speaker looked around the interior of the cabin, taking in the bareness of the place. "This is going to be a lonely trip," he complained.

"I agree, but don't try to shift the blame on me. You wanted to stop on Earth as much as I did."

"Perhaps I did . . . We were fools . . . We'll have to cover it, somehow, when we report the loss of the Provider."

The smaller one twisted uneasily. "We'll have to think of something to account for the loss . . . If They every find out we stopped on a forbidden planet!"

"It's not the first time we've broken a law."

"No . . . And all for a breath of fresh air. I still don't see how we lost the Provider. We were remote from any intelligence. The Perceptor assured us of that."

"We were careless, setting the ship down on that desert. We took things for granted. Remember, we were there for almost a period, and the locks were open the full time. We relied on the intelligence Perceptor—possibly it does not work correctly on that planet. We should have kept watch."

"Perhaps so. Still—we were never far. How could the Provider have been taken and a worthless shiny pebble be left in its place?"

"Who knows, now? Perhaps there is good reason for Earth to be forbidden."

"Well, it will be lonely trip."

Anytime

A trade rat is a small, furtive, desert rodent notorious for its skillful filching of whatever tempts its fancy. Often it will leave in exchange some bauble which it regards as of equal value.

G. Gordon Dewey.

We assume that the brain and the body are a co-ordinated whole—that without a healthy mind we cannot have a healthy body, and vice versa. Yet the body often rebels against the brain in cases of physical strain—in effect it informs the brain when it requires a rest. When it starts to dictate . . . ?

THE ENEMY WITHIN US

By E. C. TUBB

Illustrated by QUINN

Doctor Mark Wenham hurried along the green and white painted corridor and tried not to feel guilty at being late. Not that it was wholly his fault. When the conditions of employment at a hopelessly understaffed mental clinic practically demanded that he do all his paper work at home he felt justified in oversleeping once in a while. But, human nature being what it is, he still felt guilty and as he entered his office the expression on his assistant's face didn't make him feel any better.

"Morning, Mark." Doctor Fenarge, a tall, thin man with a face curiously resembling that of a horse, didn't glance at the wall clock but he might as well have done.

"So I'm late," said Mark quickly. "With the work I have to take home it's a wonder that I'm here at all." He grinned as he recognised the psychological attempt at justification of his tardiness. "Sorry, John, I just overslept."

"Forget it." Fenarge stretched as he rose from his chair. "I've been holding the fort and covering up. There's a couple of patients



waiting outside to see you and Hermitage phoned down to say that we can expect a visit from a representative of the popular press." He made a face as though he would like to spit. "I suppose we're in for the usual thing; does the Moon have any influence on our patients, are the new treatments having any colossal success, do we consider that the strain of modern life is a contributory factor to the rising incidence of mental ill-health? The same old guff to fill a couple of pages with sensationalism for the morons to gloat over."

"Lucy can handle it." Mark slipped off his topcoat and wriggled into his white jacket. "That girl's tabulated all the questions and filed them in her mind together with appropriate answers." He shrugged. "Anyway, we should worry. Any publicity is good pub-

licity if it persuades a single borderline case to volunteer for treatment before it's too late."

"You think so?" Fenarge didn't trouble to hide his sneer as he changed, slipping cigarettes and matches from his uniform jacket into the pockets of his shabby raincoat. "By the time they get through with describing all the juicy details of pre-frontal leucotomy, insulin shock, lobectomy and electro-therapy you won't be able to see a patient for dust."

"Perhaps." Mark sat down, not paying too much attention to the other's outburst. Fenarge had carried a grudge against the press ever since some casual remarks he had made before a reporter had been exaggerated and used as a basis for a silly season scoop. He nodded at his assistant as Fenarge left the room and picked up the thin sheaf of papers which gave the bare details of the two warped personalities waiting for him in the other room.

As usual they were the end products. Minds which had finally given way and broken down. Both had been sent from the local courts for observation and reports so as to determine what could be done with them, and Mark forced himself to quench his inevitable anger against a social system which insisted that mental ill-health was something not quite nice to talk about.

No one was wholly normal—no one could be when the normal was an average of the whole. Everyone was neurotic in some degrees, struggling with personal difficulties which, though non-existent to others, made their life a perpetual hell. Most managed to compromise with their troubles, venting their frustration in apparently unconnected ways, swinging between elation and despair and yet remaining outwardly normal to other, equally neurotic people. Others had been unable to adjust and swung from neurosis to psychosis, running from the difficulties of the real world into one of their own imagination.

By that time they were ready for Mark and the clinic.

The first case was one which he had seen too often. A woman, caught shoplifting, pleading kleptomania and promising to undergo treatment if the court would be merciful. It could be a genuine case, there was certainly some mental quirk which insisted that a woman, well able to buy the things she stole, should run such social danger, but there was an equal chance that she had grown wealthy through theft and had engaged a clever solicitor.

The second case was more interesting. A man had tried to commit suicide, had been found, resuscitated, and brought to trial for attempted self-murder. His explanation had not satisfied the court and so he

had been sent to the clinic. Mark pressed a button and smiled at the fresh-faced nurse who answered the summons.

"Ready for the inquest, Lucy?"

"The reporters you mean?" She smiled. "I can see to them."

"Good. You know what to do. Cut down on sensationalism and emphasize the fact that if only people volunteered for early treatment we could do a lot more good. Why they don't come will always beat me, but there it is." He looked down at the papers in his hand. "Take the woman, Mrs. Blain, to observation. Send the man, Mr. Smith, in to me."

He sighed as he prepared himself for the interview.

Smith was a carbon copy of millions just like him. Like his name there was nothing about him to single him out as a personality. A man, no longer young, sparse grey hair, weak eyes, weak chin, lined features and a harrassed expression. Not tall, not big, not outstanding in any way. A clerk perhaps, a cog in the machine of commercialism, his individuality, if there had ever been any, crushed by routine and regimentation. Mark had seen his like a thousand times before and the least surprising thing about him was that he had tried to end it all. It was probably the most original thing he had ever done.

But he was a man and was entitled to be treated as such.

"Now, Mr. Smith." Mark spoke with a professional warmth and calculated friendliness. "We needn't go into just how you came to be here, I have the details on my desk, but I would like you to tell me what it was that made you decide to end your life." He smiled at the shrinking figure in the chair and shook a little white cylinder from a packet. "Cigarette?"

"No thank you, sir." Like the man the voice was colourless, an impersonal drone devoid of both life and character.

"No? You can if you wish, you know."

"I don't smoke, sir."

"I see." Mark reluctantly returned the cigarette to its packet. It was hardly professional conduct to smoke when the patient refused to join in but he badly wanted a cigarette. "Now, Mr. Smith, about this trouble . . ." He let his voice die into questioning silence, not looking at the patient, his pencil held loosely over a scratch pad, more for effect than anything else for experience had taught him that most people like to think that what they say is important enough to be taken down. What he really did was to watch the swinging second hand of a large-scale chronometer visible to him but not to the patient.

"It tried to kill me." Smith blurted the words with something like horror then lapsed into silence as if afraid of the enormity of what he had said.

"So it tried to kill you." Mark managed not to sigh. For once he had hoped for a relatively straightforward case. Smith could have tried to kill himself for any one of a dozen quite good reasons. He could have been in debt, his girl friend—if he had one—could have proved unfaithful. He could have been passed over for promotion, lost at cards, been laughed at, hated his landlady or had a grudge against the local policeman. All of which had at one time or another served as reasons for a man killing himself exaggerated as they were by his neurosis into things of tremendous significance and magnitude. He could even, though this was rare, have calmly weighed the futility of living and decided that the game just wasn't worth the effort. But now it appeared that Smith had passed into definite psychosis and was plagued by the 'its' and 'theys' of paranoia. Deliberately Mark didn't ask the obvious question.

"Yes, sir."

"How?"

"It made me put my head into the gas oven and turn on all the taps. If I hadn't been found . . ." Smith shuddered and nervously licked his lips.

"I see. I take it then that you don't want to die?"

"No, sir."

"Good. That's one thing out of the way." He stared at the little man. "You know, you don't have to lie to me. I'm here to help you and I want you to realise that. No one wants to put you in prison or hurt you. Did you tell the magistrate that you had no intention of trying to kill yourself?"

"Yes, sir."

"I see." Mark was beginning to wonder just why Smith had been sent to the clinic. He had a persecution complex but so did a lot of other people and the courts were only concerned with the crime at hand. Attempted crime that is for suicide was the one crime a man could commit with the certain knowledge that he would never have to pay for it. If Smith had eaten humble pie, expressed his regret and promised not to do it again, there was little they could do but warn him and set him free. Obviously there was more to it than that. "Would you like to tell me just what happened? Why you felt that you had to kill yourself?"

"I didn't try to kill myself, sir. It made me do it."

"Against your will?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you think that it will try to do the same thing again?"

"I don't know, sir." Smith's sloping shoulders slumped as if beneath a terrible fatigue. "I suppose it will." He didn't volunteer

just what the 'It' was and Mark didn't want to ask. Information of that nature had to be given willingly or it would inevitably be distorted. Mark tried again.

"Will you tell me just what happened that night?" He glanced at the papers before him. "The police found you at eleven fifty-five, they were called by the occupant of the next room when he smelled gas and couldn't open your door. They reported that your windows were fastened and that the room was empty but for yourself." He looked questioningly at the little man. Logic he knew had no place in a paranoiac's world. The 'It' could be anything from a giant amoeba to a man from Mars but it was important that he learn from the patient's own lips what it was that troubled him. "At what time did you retire?"

"About ten, I don't keep late hours, sir, it doesn't like me to get too fatigued. I locked the windows and door, I always do, the neighbourhood is full of thieves and some of the other residents wouldn't hesitate to rob a man while he slept." Once started Smith seemed to have no difficulty in carrying on, and Mark noted with satisfaction the dropping of the stilted 'sir.' "I took my medicines and went to bed. It had been behaving lately so I suppose that I must have got a little careless, in any case I just didn't think that there could be any danger, and I fell asleep." He shuddered. "The next thing I knew was that I was in hospital, more dead than alive, and that a policeman warned me that I was under arrest for attempted suicide."

"You mean that you rose from your bed, put your head in the oven and turned on the gas all while you were asleep?"

"That's right."

"Incredible!" Mark shook his head as he thought about it. He had heard of somnambulism before but never to this extent. It was possible, if the death wish was strong enough, for a man to place himself in danger whilst asleep, but usually such cases had some readily apparent cause. According to Smith he didn't want to die, had no intention of dying, and his precaution of locking himself in against problematical enemies seemed to prove that.

"It made me do it," volunteered Smith timidly. "I told you that before."

Yes, thought Mark grimly. You told me that before, but obviously you have no intention of telling me just what this 'it' is. He sighed as he recognised the pattern, the mystery, the hints, the obvious waiting for the inevitable question and the inevitable distortion of the answer. A man who believed that he was persecuted hated to pin-point his enemies, to do so would be to provide something concrete to be knocked down, and so he took refuge in half-truths, general-

isations and sweeping accusations. The origin of the complex might have been his immediate boss, but he would never admit it. Instead he would expand a perfectly harmless individual into an imaginary network of spies and agents who's sole purpose of existence was to hunt him down. As the mere fact of being hunted gave him a fictional importance, the patient would cling to the fantasy against all logic and argument, and, the more argument he received the more cunning his enemies appeared.

Mark sighed as he admitted defeat and asked the inevitable question.

"In effect then, you claim that it tried to murder you. Is that right?"

"Yes."

"What is it?"

"What is what?" Smith looked genuinely puzzled and Mark remembered that the prime requisite of any psychologist is patience, patience, and still more patience.

"It tried to murder you," he explained gently. "What 'it'? Who or what tried to kill you?"

"Oh!" Smith looked down at his hands. "Didn't they tell you?"

"No."

"You're going to think this is insane," said the little man seriously. "Sometimes I think so myself, but I've had proof, too much proof, and it nearly killed me."

"What nearly killed you?"

"It did." He looked down at his hands again and when he looked up his eyes held an expression which made Mark remember that he faced a man broken by his own inner conflicts and that there *was* nothing remotely humorous or amusing in insanity. He made his voice very gentle.

"Please try to be patient with me but I want you to tell me what it was that nearly killed you. I want to help you, you know that, but I must know what it is that is troubling you."

"Of course." Smith licked his lips with his nervous gesture. "I call it 'it,' because I've disowned it, or rather it's disowned me. Perhaps it would be more correct to say that I tried to kill me."

"What?" Beneath the cover of the desk Mark clenched his hands until the nails dug into his palm. Used as he was to the vagaries of the mentally ill, yet he was still human and with limited patience then, as he stared at the haggard features opposite him, the man's meaning became clear. "You mean . . ."

"Yes, said Smith simply. "My body tried to kill me."

Mark sighed and pressed the button on his desk.

Fenarge scowled as he prodded a spoon into the cup of tepid tea, sipped, pulled a face, and swallowed the brew in two great swallows. "One day," he said bitterly, "they're actually going to put some sugar into this stuff and then get certified for insane waste."

Mark grunted from where he sat in the white cone of a desk lamp. His head ached and his eyes seemed filled with sand so that the printed forms before him blurred and wavered a little. Tiredly he pushed them away, cursing the eternal paper work which took so much of his time when he would rather be dealing with actual patients. He shivered as he reached for his tea, the cold of the winter night overrode the obsolete heating system so that the air held a bitter nip. Thankfully he lit the cigarette Fenarge threw towards him, filled his lungs with smoke and blew a distorted smoke ring at the too-bright eye of the desk lamp.

"Speaking of certification," said Fenarge casually. "How's the pet patient?"

"Smith?" Mark shrugged. "He's been under observation for a week now and his delusion is as strong as ever it was."

"I read about it." Fenarge gestured towards the files. "Paranoia, of course, but it's the first time I've ever heard anyone accuse their own bodies of attempted murder. Schizophrenia?"

"Naturally, he has all the basic symptoms. Disorder of thinking, emotional incongruity, hallucinations and disturbed impulses but it is the outlet which is so unusual. He literally regards his body as something totally separate from his mind, something in fact, quite inimical and it's going to be the devil's own job to restore his sanity."

"Maybe we shouldn't even try." Fenarge stared at the tip of his cigarette. "You know, sometimes when I look at what we have to deal with and the things we do to try and restore 'normality,' I wonder if we're doing the right thing. All these people," his gesture included both the wards and the world, "have reached a state of mind which, to them, is perfectly satisfactory. They have given up, surrendered, lost themselves in a world of their own imagination, and then we jerk them out of it, shake up their beliefs and force them back into the life from which they have escaped. In a way we set ourselves up as Gods, and sometimes I wonder if one day we may have to answer for it."

"If I didn't know you, Fenarge," said Mark evenly, "I'd say that you were talking like a fool. We've only got the end products here, those who have finally 'surrendered' as you call it. But what of all the others? What of the millions who hover on the borderline? Do you think for one moment that they are happy? Have you ever seen a manic depressive? Can you even guess at the black misery those damned souls are in? No, Fenarge, the popular conception of insanity,

that of a man sticking straws in his hair and acting like an irresponsible moron, is so far from being the truth that those who propagate it should be shot as public menaces. It is scorn and ridicule which prevent people seeking early treatment, the social stigma attaching to any family with a member 'not quite right in the head.' Damn it, Fenarge, as a doctor you should know better!"

"You're jumping the gun again, Mark." Fenarge shook his head at the other's expression. "I agree with you, every word, but I wasn't talking about borderline cases. Take old Mrs. Perkins for example. All her life she has tried to emulate a horse in the sheer, animal-like drudgery of bringing up a useless husband and eight children on an income hardly sufficient to house and keep a thoroughbred dog. Finally she gives up, or her mind breaks, or she goes insane, take your pick of what you call it. She comes here and we look after her. She is in no pain. She has no worries. She spends all of her time talking to the friends she never had, surrounded by luxury she can never hope to experience, and living in a world of pure fantasy. What can we offer her? We stab her brain with electricity and jar her with shock therapy. We may even manage to jerk her out of her private world and back to an acceptance of reality. Then what? Back home to a selfish clod and a gang of whining children. Back to eighteen hours a day slave-labour, to semi-starvation, to blows and brutality. Can you honestly say that we are doing the right thing if we 'cure' her?"

"Special pleading," snapped Mark irritably. "We can't be judges as to who and who not to cure. The social system isn't our fault—it only fills our wards, and our job is to empty them as fast as possible."

"Send them back to hell, you mean, don't you?"

"I didn't say that and you know better than to believe it. Not all of those who come here are happy—quite the reverse in fact. A paranoiac lives in a world in which he can never know a moments peace. A manic depressive is so miserable that if he gets any better he will commit suicide as a way of escape." Mark glanced at his wrist watch. "Time for the night round. You'd better come with me, Fenarge, I'd like your opinion on Smith, I'm getting a little worried about him."

"Why?"

Mark didn't answer as he crushed out the butt of his cigarette and led the way out of the office.

The wards were long, narrow, overcrowded relics of a bygone era. The rows of white-sheeted beds rested on a polished floor and a night-light threw a bluish glow over the ranked cots, giving them a vague, almost unreal air.



Sound murmured from them, the sigh of a restless mind, the subdued mumblings of a rambling brain, the sudden laugh of a twisted soul who somehow, somewhere, had found humour. Once a man reared up and swore with vile obscenity at a figment of his imagination, and low sobbing from a patient far gone in misery made a subdued whisper in the restless silence.

"I've put Smith in a private room," said Mark quietly as they trod on rubber-soled shoes through the frigid, dim-lit wards. "I didn't want him upset by the others."

"Padded?"

"No, he isn't violent and besides, he's only under observation."

Fenarge nodded, feeling his usual discomfort as he followed the psychiatrist through the silent hospital. He doubted if he could ever get used to the sight of blank yet watchful eyes, the dull faces and vacuous expressions of the patients, the sense of alieness, the impression of an invisible barrier between them, the uncomfortable feeling of handling something which could, at any moment, explode in his face. And yet dealing with the mind held a fascination all of its own. The problem was stupendous and, in a way, he relished the challenge. He swallowed as he followed the elder man through a narrow door.

Smith was awake, lying supine, his hands outside the sheets his eyes glazed as they stared up at the ceiling. He didn't look towards them as Mark silently dismissed the male nurse, and he didn't pay any attention as Mark sat down beside the cot.

"How are you feeling, Smith? Comfortable?"

"Yes thank you, sir."

"Can't sleep?"

"No, sir."

Mark sighed at the terse answers and the stilted title. He nodded to Fenarge to sit down then leaned across the motionless man and gently timed the pulse.

"How's it being behaving, Smith?"

"Not too badly, thank you, sir. I had a little trouble when . . ." Almost the man blushed. "I don't like using . . ."

"I know, Smith, but you must get used to it. I want you to have absolute rest, absolute you understand, and going to the lavatory isn't resting." Mark smiled with warm understanding. "What happened?"

"I tripped, my ankle turned just as it did . . ." Again the little man seemed to be on the point of a confidence and Mark tried not to sigh at the invariable recoil away from what he needed to know. Fenarge leaned forward, his voice startlingly loud in the hushed silence.

"How did it all begin, Smith? When did you first decide that your body was a rebel with a life of its own?"

For a moment Mark thought that his assistant had gone too far. Explanations were anathema to a paranoic for explanations would reveal how illogical his concepts were, but to his surprise Smith didn't wander into vague generalisations and wild assumptions, neither did he immediately freeze into silence. Instead he looked thoughtfully at the young man.

"Do you think that I'm insane?" he asked quietly, then, before Fenarge could answer. "Never mind. I realise how it must seem, but I'm not insane, though sometimes I wish I were."

"Tell us about it," urged Mark gently and frowned Fenarge to silence as the little man began to speak.

"I've always lived a quiet life, I was a clerk before I had to stop work, and I've read a great deal—odd books mostly, several text books and works dealing with the mind and the body. I started taking an interest after my body almost killed me, and I wanted to find out why." He paused as if searching for words and Mark forced himself not to interrupt.

"I suppose it all started when I was doing a lot of paper work, my eyes began to ache and it wasn't until I caught a cold and had to rest that they grew better. After that I always seemed to be falling ill. Colds, migraine, gastritis and even childhood diseases such as chicken pox and mumps. Each illness seemed to coincide with a period of intense work and always I seemed to get better when the work eased up. Even then I didn't guess what was wrong and it wasn't until the first time my body tried to kill me that I began taking it seriously."

"When was that?" Mark kept his voice low and was surprised to get an answer.

"About five years ago. My ankle turned just as I was about to cross the road. It was raining, the traffic was heavy, and I fell down in front of a bus. If the driver hadn't managed to pull up I'd have been cut in half by the front wheel." He paused again and in the dim light Mark could see sweat shining on the sallow features. "That was the first time. The second incident happened about a year later. I was standing on the Embankment watching the sunset on the water. I still don't know how it happened but one moment I was leaning on the parapet and the next I was in the water." Incredibly he smiled. "I can't swim and if a policeman hadn't been passing by I should have drowned."

"Coincidence," whispered Fenarge and fell into silence at Mark's glare.

"Perhaps, but it began to worry me. Little things began to mount up, a slight cut invariably meant a fester or a poisoned hand. I had to stop shaving myself—I was afraid that my hand would cut my throat. I even had to move to a ground floor room—I was afraid of falling down the stairs. Little things perhaps, nothing in themselves, but when things keep on happening there has to be something behind them. It took me three years to discover that my body was trying to injure me, and even then I didn't think it would go as far as murder."

"What did you think it was after?"

"Rest." Smith stared at Mark and his eyes shone in the dim reflection of the shaded bulb. "It wanted to rest, and the best way it could do it was to incapacitate me."

"So you believe that your body has conscious awareness?" Fenarge spoke before Mark could stare him to silence. "Is that what you are trying to say?"

"Yes." Smith looked at the young man, then, slowly, his eyes shifted towards the psychiatrist. "Is it so incredible?"

"It's uncommon," said Mark cautiously. "I assume that you've given the matter some thought?"

"I have," said Smith grimly, and for once his voice seemed to hold life and character. "It isn't hard once you study it. In the old days a man had to rely on his body, he depended on his reactions and had no time to think, but now we have replaced the automatic response to danger with studied consideration. The body may not like that. It was used to being the superior partner and I believe that it is getting its own back in the only way it can. You see, we are made of cells, and each cell has a life of its own. Groups of cells make the nerves and muscles, other groups form the eyes and skin, yet other groups make the ears and sinews. We work those groups hard, work them without any consideration for what they may really want, and, like humans, they want to rest. The brain won't let them rest—and so they revolt, go on strike, refuse to obey their commands." He raised himself on one elbow and his eyes glittered with a desperate urgency.

"You've got to believe me! You've got to! Because it isn't just me, you know. What about all the inexplicable suicides? The freak accidents? The rising tide of chronic illness? I've read about it and I know what's happening. Cancer—what else is that but a revolt of body tissue? Ulcers—a protest against wrong feeding. Weak eyes and deafness, aren't they caused by artificial light and traffic noise? There are a dozen clues and once you admit the fact that the body has a separate awareness then you can see what terrible danger we are in. My body has ruined me, I can no longer work, I've got to consider it at every moment of the day and night and if I forget and force it to do what it doesn't want then it strikes back. Wounds which refuse to heal, pains for no apparent cause, injuries through the inexplicable failure of a muscle to obey and do its job. Finally . . ." He gulped and relaxed, his thin features shining with sweat. "It's going to kill me. I know it but what can I do? I'm so tired of having to watch it all the time. So tired . . ."

"Then get some rest." Mark tipped a capsule into a glass, added water, and handed it to the little man. "Here. Drink this and get some sleep." He waited until the man had swallowed the sleeping draught. "Now, don't worry, Smith. Don't worry about anything. We'll soon be able to solve your problem. Just rest now and leave it

all to us." He let his voice fade into silence as the lids closed over the glazing eyes then, gesturing to Fenarge, left the tiny room.

They didn't speak on their way back to the office and Mark was glad of the silence. His headache had grown worse and his eyes burned in his head. Overwork, of course, every specialist in the clinic was overworked but knowing the cause didn't help the complaint. Irritably he snapped on the desk light and reached for Smith's file. Fenarge lit cigarettes, passed one to Mark, then stared thoughtfully at the heaped papers on the desk.

"What did you think of it?"

"Smith?" Mark shrugged. "A typical, well-integrated delusion, but I had expected as much." He sighed. "He will have to be certified, of course, if we let him go he would only kill himself in one way or another."

"You think so?"

"Isn't it obvious? He is convinced that his body is killing him so, in order to bolster the delusion, he will subconsciously hurt himself, take risks, have accidents, anything to prove his point. The inevitable result is that he will commit suicide."

"I wonder." Fenarge frowned and looked at his cigarette as though he had never seen it before. "What he said could make sense, you know. I've been thinking about it and it isn't as crazy as it sounds."

"Of course it makes sense," snapped Mark tiredly. "Any concept will make sense if you choose the right premises on which to base your logic, but that doesn't mean that it is right. You noticed the way he mentioned cancer and in that he was right. Cancer is an uncontrolled growth of normal tissue but there is no reason to suppose that the cells do it deliberately through conscious awareness. He mentioned stomach ulcers and we know that they are psychosomatic—worry and mental strain will cause ulcers, but he was arguing in reverse. The idea of the body and mind as separate identities has been dropped long ago. We now know that mind and body are one, that without a healthy mind we cannot have a healthy body."

"And vice versa?" Fenarge smiled at Mark's expression. "Can we have a healthy mind without a healthy body? If mental stress cause stomach ulcers, wouldn't stomach ulcers cause mental stress?" He dragged at his cigarette. "I was watching Smith while he was talking and it seemed to me that he was an intelligent man who had given the matter some thought. I know that intelligence has nothing to do with stability, quite the reverse in fact. It takes intelligence to work out an entire new concept, based on delusion, but the thing is that he was right in what he said."

"Please!" Mark tried to control his impatience. "If you're going to believe in everything a paranoiac tells you you'll wind up as a patient. There's a man here who can convince you that he is a reincarnation of Moses and, if you accept his proofs, you will believe him. Another is convinced that he holds the secret of immortality, we won't know if he is telling the truth until he dies, and anyway, he refuses to divulge it. There is a woman who will convert you to accepting the fact that we are all dead and Earth is Hell.

"Sometimes I'm tempted to believe her, but the main weight of evidence tells us otherwise. Smith has an arguable case—they all have, but that's why he is here. If he didn't believe in it it would remain no more than an imaginative fantasy." He frowned. "One thing I will admit, he didn't try to stress it too much and he was right about the rising incidence of psychosomatic illnesses."

"Exactly. Oh, I know that he could have got it all from books but when you think about it it becomes a tempting suggestion. Are we being too insistant on saying that the brain controls the body? The ancients didn't believe that. The old tales of possession and the biblical warning that, if thy hand offends thee cut it off, goes to prove that at one time they must have held similar beliefs. Could we be wrong? Could our bodies really have a separate awareness and if so, wouldn't that awareness develop, mutate perhaps over centuries of time?"

"No!" Mark crushed out his cigarette and picked up a pencil. "I don't want to be offensive, Fenarge, but I don't think that you're cut out for psychiatry. You're too impressionable, too prone to sympathise with the patients' delusion. I would suggest that you try some other field."

"Thank you." Anger made the assistant's voice brittle. "Are you going to submit that suggestion to the Board?"

"Do you want me to?" Mark stared at the young man, a formless shape outside the cone of brilliance, then, recognising that his irritation stemmed from fatigue and overstrain, forced himself to smile. "Sorry. But I was serious about the warning. You wouldn't be the first psychiatrist to end up as a patient in a mental ward. Forget Smith and his wild delusion. It's an interesting conception, but your own experience should enable you to discount it utterly."

"It doesn't," said Fenarge quietly. "Just the reverse in fact, but never mind that now. What will happen to Smith?"

"The usual. Rest and occupational therapy. Maybe we'll try insulin shock then, if that fails, electro-therapy and narcohypnosis." He sighed as he made swift notations on the file. "What we should try, of course, is psycho-analysis but we haven't got a couple of years

to spare even if we had the staff to do it. From the strength of his delusion I'm afraid that we may have to try neuro-surgery. It's quick, will get rid of his delusion, and enable him to return to his work. In any case we can't let him go as he is. It would be murder."

"I suppose it would." Fenarge glanced at his wrist watch and rose to his feet. "Time for another round." He stepped forward as Mark made to rise from the desk. "I'll handle it. You finish the paper work and I'll meet you in the canteen. Right?"

Mark nodded, squinting as he stooped over the closely ruled forms.

It grew very quiet after Fenarge left. A low gurgle came from the radiator as it struggled against the biting cold then the gurgle faded to silence as if yielding to an invisible foe. Mark grunted, rubbing his eyes and wishing that he could get away from it all, thinking of taking some of his unused leave and knowing that when it came to it his conscience wouldn't allow him to leave patients who depended on him.

Twice he made mistakes, filling out the wrong sections on the form, and then his pencil broke and made an ugly tear in the thin paper. He sighed, then leaning back lit a cigarette and frowned thoughtfully at the drifting smoke.

Could Fenarge have been right in his defence of Smith? It was an interesting speculation and his tired mind toyed with it as a dog will toy with a bone. Why did eyes ache when overworked? Why did mental strain induce stomach ulcers!? Were accidents caused by slowed reactions and if so, why? Was it possible that highly specialised groups of cells such as an eye or a tendon, could have a dim awareness of their own?

The drifting smoke seemed to close around him and his imagination painted vivid pictures of a slave state, ruled by a tyrannical brain, the slave-cells whipped to the limits of their endurance, finally to revolt and deliberately sabotage the whole. It was logical enough, he admitted. Take a slave state in which the labouring class had no idea of the whole complexity of their nation. A modern city, say, where the garbage collectors wanted a rest and so let the sewers overflow so as to get laid off until the damage had been repaired. Or a factory where the boy threw a spanner in the works because he wanted a day off to see a football match.

Could the body be like that? Could a muscle fail so as to cause injury and force the whole to rest? Were the ancients right in their supposition of the body as being a thing separate from the mind? Mark remembered the tales of anchorites who had whipped their bodies to erase desires, others who had struck off their hands for

killing in the heat of rage. Senseless procedures in the light of modern knowledge but if the mind and body were twin identities, then the idea of punishing the flesh for refusing to obey the dictates of the mind made sense.

He jerked to sudden pain and scowled at the forgotten cigarette singeing his fingers. Hastily he crushed it out and, half-annoyed with himself for wasting time in idle speculation, rose to his feet. He smiled as he rubbed his tired eyes and stretched his aching muscles. If Smith was right then he should soon have positive proof. He had been driving himself too long and too hard for any self-respecting body to bear and it was about time it protested.

But somehow he didn't think that it would.

Snapping off the desk lamp he thrust the files back into their cabinet, scooped up his cigarettes from the desk and, with a last look round, made his way towards the door.

His ankle turned beneath him on the third stride.

He swore, falling helplessly towards the door, his arms failing as he tried to regain balance, and pain jarred him as he crashed against the jamb. Tensely he examined his shoulder, wincing at the bruised muscle and bone, yet grateful that he had suffered no serious injury. If he hadn't twisted . . . If he had landed head-first . . . Concussion would have been the least he could have expected. Angrily he glared at his ankle.

"Damn you !" he said bitterly. "Are you trying to kill me?"

—E. C. Tubb.

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There are rare occasions when a Post Office franking machine is set incorrectly and a letter is received theoretically before it is posted. But not often. When the morning mail begins to arrive one month before it should don't blame the postal authorities. The reason could be much deeper.

THE MAILMAN

By JOSEPH SLOTKIN

Another jet screamed across the sky vault, blatting and roaring into oblivion in an instant, but Henry Nearing wasn't paying it any attention. Henry Nearing—at least that was the name on his most recent marriage license — was too used to the space-shattering whooshes made by pilots testing planes for the nearby aircraft plant.

And besides, he was too busy staring at the postcard the mailman had just dropped into the box. The mail had been an hour early today, and Nearing had only discovered the card that soon because he made it a habit to keep his eye on the mailbox.

A watchful eye; a wary eye. It wouldn't do to let his most recent wife, Jenny, pick up the mail. You could never tell what it might reveal. So he had developed this "considerate" habit of always going out to the post by the wire fence and bringing back whatever the box might contain.

Only a card, this time. Just an advertisement from a real estate company in Pasadena, offering to buy, sell or rent his house. His house? *Jenny's* house.

That was all. Just an advertisement. No please-come-back letters—no pleading missives from any of the other widows, who had married Horace Nealy, or Harvey Knox, or Hiram Nesbitt, only to discover one fine morning that the honeymoon, and their little inheritances, had vanished into the recent past along with the charming, genteel husband of newly-exciting acquaintance who had swept them off their aging feet.

As he passed the wastebasket on his way to his mid-morning cup of coffee, Henry Nearing had been about to drop the card, when he had casually glanced at the postmark: June 29th. That was all right. That was today. Pretty good service the post office must be giving lately, in spite of only one daily delivery. Usually it took at least a day from Pasadena to the Val——

And then Nearing noticed the time on the card. Stamped clearly above the date on the little round postmark was: "3 p.m." He frowned, glanced at his watch. The hands showed 9.45. The sun said it was morning.

Oh, well. Just a common post office mistake. Nearing decided, shrugged, and let the card flutter into the basket.

He was marbling his coffee with half-and-half when he heard the first hints of the bathroom overture. Jenny always slept a little later, and now she was tuning up. From the preliminary clink of her partial plates in the glass to the atonal gargling and strangled gasping, he could conjure up an all-too-clear picture of just what the female he had married was going through in preparation for the dismal day.

He fortified himself with a sip of coffee as he heard her heels clicking in the hall. And then she made her entrance.

Jenny Nearing, the widowed Mrs. Watkins, née Parkhurst, had undoubtedly caused many a male head to turn on her way to—high school; but since then, education had advanced by leaps and bounds, while her leaps were bounded by the force of gravity against lactic acid. Still, she made an entrance, drawing up her wrapper tightly, and mincing in rueful travesty of faded loveliness.

Nearing watched her prepare her potion of weak cocoa, and shuddered, eyeing the milky mess, which she enhanced with a blob of marshmallow. Sitting across the table, smiling at her new husband, Jenny arched her head on a stringy neck, and inquired whether he had slept well.

A slow motion picture of the shambles of the night before unreeled itself relentlessly in Nearing's mind.

"Of course, my dear," he said. "I always sleep well, after——"

She revealed a flash of gold and plastic, then her lips tightened.

"That coffee is from yesterday, my sweet. I told you to let me——"

"But I didn't want you to bother. You don't drink coffee yourself."

"Oh, but I love to prepare it for you . . . Frank—" Her eyes became misty as she mentioned her dear departed— "Frank always took a cup of chocolate with me in the morning."

He would, Nearing reflected. Frank Watkins, her first. A cautious man. Caffeine would have been too destructive for him, probably considered coffee to be poisonous. The kind of man who did things methodically, surely. Never took a shower. Only a bath.

And yet, he mused, that was ultimately his undoing. Perhaps if he had reached to turn on the electric heater from a shower instead of a bath, that spark would never have—

But it did, and here was Henry, the vulture at the feast. He frowned, averting his eyes from the weak cocoa Jenny was drinking.

"Anything in the mail?" Jenny inquired brightly. "Oh, it's still too early, isn't it?"

"No," Henry said hastily. "The mail came, just a card." Again he frowned uneasily, then went on, "First time the cheque's been late."

"Well, maybe it'll come tomorrow," Jenny burbled, mouthing the marshmallow, a rim of white flecking her upper lip like a misplaced moustache. She smiled, stickily. "After all, we have plenty."

Yes, Nearing was thinking, plenty. And again he cursed the hated memory of Frank Watkins, the careful coot who had fixed his insurance policy so that it would be paid in twelve equal instalments in the event of his death.

"Frank, dear Frank, didn't want me to be hasty. He was so afraid I might do something foolish, or someone would take advantage of me. But when I met you, I knew I was safe," Jenny had told him shortly after their engagement. A short engagement.

Only two more months to go, Henry Nearing was thinking, when from far away came the sound of the mailbox cover clacking.

Jenny raised inquiring eyes, and for a moment Nearing could have sworn there was just a ghost of suspicion lurking deep within those faded pupils, but then the wrinkles at the corners transformed her expression, and she giggled.

"My goodness. Another delivery. Like old times."

She half rose, but Nearing anticipated her. "No, I'll get it," he shot back over his shoulder, already opening the door, adding the palliative "My dear."

"So considerate . . ." The words Jenny was saying reached him only dimly, for Nearing was looking up and down the road, searching for the mailman. He wanted to ask him a question.

As Nearing reached the post, he caught sight of the mailman vanishing across the hedge.

He reached into the box. Yes, there it was. The familiar, white envelope with the transparent window from which peeked the yellow fabric Nearing was waiting for: only two more months now.

As he went back up the walk, he glanced casually at the postmark. June 27th, 7 p.m., San Francisco. Well, that was pretty good, for these semi-rural deliveries. Yes, it made sense.

Another jet was streaking across the sky as he opened the door. Jenny was shivering.

"I do wish Frank hadn't been so interested in airplanes that he bought this house right next to an airp—— Oh, it's come!"

"Yes . . . my dear." Carelessly, Nearing laid the precious oblong near her smudged saucer. She glanced up, archly.

"You can deposit it tomorrow, my sweet. You know I don't care about such things."

This was a propitious moment. "Couldn't you get that insurance company to pay the next two installments now?"

Jenny seemed shocked. "Oh, darling, and go against dear Frank's wishes?"

"I'd never make you wait like that, if——"

"Please, my sweet——" And Nearing suffered the shock of her cooling, slightly clammy palm against his lips. "Don't even say it. I couldn't stand——"

"I'm sorry," he murmured. "I know how you feel."

"Of course you know how I feel," she whinnied. "You're so very, very sensitive."

Yes, he knew, all right. Hadn't he been forced to undergo a complete physical examination before Jenny would agree to marry him—to remarry.

"I—like you very much now, Henry, but I wouldn't want to go through the pain of another loss. So before I let myself get in too deep——"

Yes, dear, birdlike, timid Jenny. And he had submitted to the ordeal, signed statements of health, put his name, as though he had really been born with the appellation of "Henry Nearing," with a grand flourish, on all the forms she had held out to him in her shy, doe-like way.

Well, in two months she would lose another husband—and their joint savings account of ten thousand dollars to boot. And fervently, Nearing promised himself that this would be the last time. He was tired of aging ingenues, and of playing the role of comforting Casanova.

As he made out a cheque for the light and water bill the next morning, he added one more role to the repertoire he would no longer play after he had absconded this time—that of devoted book-keeper and payer-of-bills.

The clack of the mailbox cover interrupted his plunging further into self-sympathy.

The mailman—a different one this time, was just heading for the hedge as Nearing reached the post. Before he could call to him, Nearing saw the tall, angular figure, bent under the weight of the leather bag, start to walk through the hedge as though it weren't there. The hedge seemed a bit fuzzy at that point, for a moment.

A jet screamed across the sky, and Nearing glanced up nervously. When he had turned his gaze back to the hedge, it seemed solid enough, and the mailman was gone.

Compressing his lips, Nearing fished into the mailbox, and pulled out the slim little throwaway newspaper that came around once a week, on Thursdays.

. . . Thursdays? But this was only Tuesday. Nearing glanced at his watch: 9.45 a.m. The mail an hour early again, too.

Shrugging, he placed his envelope containing the cheque for the power company in the mail box, and lifted the little red flag.

He started toward the house, his eyes roving over the paper's mast-head. Well, it said July second, but these things were prepared ahead of time, and—

A news item, almost buried under the blurbs, caught his eye:

Teresa Cummings, elected yesterday as Beauty Queen of the Valley Vikings, held court in the pavilion of . . .

Just a small town's version of Who, What, Why, Where, and When, Nearing thought, smiling to himself. A fixed beauty contest, which wasn't supposed to be decided until tomorrow, for the day-after-tomorrow's paper.

Little bells began to ring in his consciousness. No, this was too much to be coincidence. And yet—

The little bells became a scream, and a jet plane whooshed across the blue, sweeping the sky clear, leaving earth-shaking thunder in its wake. Then the little bells began again, but they were somewhat off-key and cracked.

Nearing realised he was hearing Jenny's unbell-like voice calling to him. She was on the porch, her wrapper coyly held around her, though the hedge surrounded them completely and the nearest neighbour was miles away.

"Sweet, whatever are you doing there in the rain? Stop standing there and come in before you catch your death."

Nearing looked up, and a drop hit him splat in the eye. Then he realised the paper in his hand was a crumpled, soggy mess. He couldn't remember when the rain had started, or how long he had been standing there, because an idea had struck him.

A crazy idea. But he had to talk to that mailman!

Mechanically, he squished into the house. He saw, through the water that was running over his face, that Jenny had brewed him a fresh pot of coffee.

"Do put that soggy paper down and come here," Jenny was ordering him, as though he were a little child.

Then, before he could stop her, she had grabbed the paper, glanced at it, "hmmphed" mightily, and tossed it into the fireplace.

"Just that stupid advertising thing," she dismissed it, stirring her mess of weak cocoa.

For a moment rage flared through Nearing as he watched the damp paper curl and catch, smoke and crisp against the burning wood. His first reaction was to plunge into the fireplace to rescue it. He thought of how the hot flames would sear the flesh of his hands . . .

No matter, Nearing thought, relaxing. His mind was made up.

"My dear," he began, "did your first—did Frank ever say why he bought this house?"

"Shpzzz temuvin," came from Jenny.

"What?"

There was a clack as her plates adjusted, and the marshmallow was masticated, and she explained, "He said something about having space to move around in."

"You said he liked planes."

"Yes," she giggled. "I never could understand why he liked to listen to those horrible super-sonic jets. But he said—he said—now just exactly how did he put it? I know it was sort of pretty. Kind of poetic, I thought at the time . . ."

"Well, never mind, my dear," Nearing began, about to change the subject, when she leaned forward eagerly.

"Oh, yes, now I remember. 'They go so fast they tear back the curtain of time and sweep the sky clear of doubt.' Now wasn't that pretty? Wasn't that just beautiful?"

Her vapid face seemed to be struggling with mixed expressions for a moment, before she found the right words. "Wasn't that poetic?"

". . . Tear back the curtain of time, and sweep . . ." Nearing was repeating, slowly, meditatively, when he sat bolt upright.

The red flag on the mailbox had just been hit down.

Ignoring Jenny's protestations that he'd catch his death, Nearing rushed into the rain, just in time to catch sight of the mailman—the

shorter, regular one, swathed in oilskins, skirting the hedge in a normal, sane, realistic fashion. He looked at the box. The mailman had taken the cheque for the power company.

There was no other mail. Jenny was calling to him from the porch. He went back, drank the scalding coffee gratefully, and squinted at her.

"Did he ever—talk to the mailman?"

"Hmmm? Oh, I guess so. He used to, especially when that air-plane factory first started up. I guess they both liked planes. Mostly, he just said hello and goodbye to him, though.

"He was like you," she added, archly. "Considerate. He'd head right out to get the mail the minute that cover slammed—seemed to listen for it, even. Never would *hear* of me taking the trouble to go out there."

Nearing sipped the rest of his coffee in silence, Jenny's clatter reaching him dimly. After she had gone back to the bathroom, he sat at his desk and wrote a letter, and enclosed a cheque. Jenny came in, and peered over his shoulder. He recoiled slightly from the odour of cologne.

"I thought we might get a real daily paper, my dear."

"Hmm? Well, if you want one, my sweet. Goodness, I don't even read that weekly that comes around. I guess I just got out of the habit of reading newspapers."

Good. Better. Even best. He might stay on with Jenny a little longer than he had intended. It might all depend on the mailman. The *other* one.

The next morning, at 9.30, Nearing was by the box, glancing anxiously up and down the road. The subscription to the paper was in his hand. Nine forty-five passed. Ten. Ten-thirty. Then 10.45, and the squat figure of the mailman, hunched under his heavy bag, rounded the bend of the road.

"Mornin', Mr. Nearing. Quite a shower yesterday, eh?" In a normal, everyday fashion, the mailman took the envelope containing Nearing's subscription and cheque, and was about to pass on.

"No mail for me today?"

"Eh? Oh, well, I guess no news is good news," the postman said, chuckling and shaking his head at his own witty originality.

"Uh— I guess when Mr. Watkins—my wife's first husband was living here, he— used to get more mail than I, eh?" It was a tentative cast.

"Who? Oh, old Frank? He'd get a bill once in a while, same's all of us, ha, ha, ha. Nice fella, though. Sociable. Liked to hear him talk, too—though it didn't make much sense, sometimes."

"Sometimes?"

"Oh, I dunno. About this road, like for instance. Said how'd I know it was the only road up here? As if I didn't know that, after arguin' with the postmaster about tryin' to get a car up here, and him tellin' me th' budget, an' th' administration——"

"The— only road?" Nearing interrupted impatiently.

"Yeh. Said maybe for all I know there was another road, right next to this, and one right next to *that*, prob'ly."

"Probably?"

"Yeh. What do y'know about that? Said they was all hid by curtains or somethin'."

"Curtains?"

"That's what I mean about not makin' sense. Seems as if they was curtains around here, we'd all see 'em. But old Frank, he argued about *invisible* curtains like them on levels of a stage. A stage of time, he'd say. A time with all kinds of probble—probba—probabilities, that's it, probilities. How d'ya like that? I guess he was just joshing me. Nice fella, though."

The mailman hitched up his bag. "Gotta go, Mr. Nearing. Like they say, time don't wait fer no mailman."

Nearing let him go.

The next day was Saturday. The pilots testing the jets had a day off. Nearing got an advertisement from a paint company, offering to coat his house with mastic at a special price, brought to him by the talkative mailman. There was no other mail.

Sunday, he watched Jenny put two marshmallows in her weak cocoa. He didn't sleep much Sunday night, and early Monday morning fell into a fitful slumber. A scream awoke him. He lay rigid in bed, tremors running over his suddenly catatonic body. His head turned on a stiff neck. Jenny was still asleep.

Awake, he knew it had been a jet, and the muscles of his rigid frame slowly melted into human tissue again, like ice dipped in warm water. He was pulling out his watch, when he heard it.

The clack of the mail box cover. Which one was it?

Taking no time to look at his watch, he raced to the front gate post, staring madly up and down the road. An angular figure, carrying a heavy leather bag, was walking right through an oddly fuzzy hedge, vanishing as he gaped.

Hardly daring to hope, he thrust his hand into the mailbox. His nails scraping against the cold metal. His fingers felt a thick, yielding cylinder. He clawed it up out of the box.

A daily newspaper.

A newspaper, in response to a subscription he had mailed Friday. A newspaper, printed in San Francisco, so that the circulation department would have to *mail* him copies.

Feverishly, he tore off the brown wrapping and, hardly able to see through the grey mist of his excitement, glared at the masthead.

It was better than he had dared hope! A newspaper from San Francisco would ordinarily take at least a day to get to the Los Angeles area, and he had been expecting the "time-space curtain," as he secretly had named it, to allow him one day in the future.

But this paper was dated August 6th. One month in the future! What was it the regular mailman had said about roads?

"And one right next to *that*, probably."

He had only to scan the stock reports! Look at the real estate developments, the sporting page! And this was just the first copy! There would be more.

More? His eye caught a flash of white in the box. Hastily, he reached in and pulled out two long white envelopes.

Familiar white envelopes, they were, with the name of Norwald, Frye, and Schubacher printed in the upper left hand corner—the name of Jenny's insurance company. And the yellow fabric peeking out. The yellow fabric of cheques.

Of course. The other instalments, early, too. But they were just a flash in the pan, now. Still, now that they were here, he was free to abscond. He imagined he could hear the jingling of golden coins.

The jingling suddenly became atonal and jarring. It cross-faded, cruelly, to the voice he knew so well. He looked up.

Jenny was standing on the porch, concern on her ageing face; she was beckoning him inside.

"My sweet, what ever are you doing out there without your robe? Come in and have your nice fresh coffee."

So she had made his coffee again. It might not be so bad here. After all, thought Nearing, chuckling to himself, he had a *future* here. He might stay, and when it became unbearable—when the sight of the weak cocoa with its subaqueous, white-tentacled marshmallow, and the sound of the cracking, atonal voice became too much—who knows, perhaps the aging crone would have an accident, miles from the nearest neighbour. After all, old bones——

He tucked the precious paper tightly under his arm. Time for that after his morning's refreshment. Almost scornfully, he slipped the white envelopes into the pocket of his nightshirt.

The coffee was scalding, and he gulped it gratefully. Jenny was coyly stirring her milky mess. She had something on her mind.

"My sweet, I noticed the advertisement from the paint company."

Jenny noticing something !

"It does seem a bargain, and I know this old house needs going over."

How domestic for a woman who scarcely stirred from her routine between the bed, the hated nauseous bed, the kitchen, and the bathroom.

Nearing nodded absently. "I'll have an estimate one of these days."

"But, my sweet, I thought you might do something about the leaks right now."

"Leaks?" Preoccupied, Nearing was fingering the envelopes in his pocket. Jenny noticed. She was noticing things, today.

"Oh, another cheque?" Time seemed to mean nothing to her.

"Yes." He chanced it. They would be dated in the future, but he could cover that with some plausible explanation about the habits of big insurance companies and their accounting departments. He ripped open the first, scarcely glanced at the date, knowing it would be in the future, greedily verified the amount, and laid it aside, to deposit later.

"As I was saying, those leaks in the front, and on the roof, are terrible. I thought of it during the rain the other day. If you'd look at it—"

"Of course, of course." He was tearing open the second envelope.

"I thought I'd help you, so I set up the ladder while you were at the mailbox."

Ladder? Jenny setting up a ladder? His fingers paused in the act of extracting the contents of the second envelope. Idly, he thought: she must be stronger than she looks.

"Later, my dear, later," he murmured, glancing down at the cheque in his hand, and casually unfolding the enclosed letter. It wasn't addressed to him. It was addressed to Jenny.

"No, now."

Something in her voice made him look up. The way she was staring at him . . . he had thought of her as an aging crone, awkwardly fading away.

But there was fire behind that impassive mask, now.

It made him uneasy. Even a bit ill. Was he imagining it, or was her face changing? His eyes seemed to be playing tricks on him—blurring things . . .

He took another sip of the cooling coffee. For a moment, the warmth made him feel better. And yet, it didn't taste quite right.

Automatically, he obeyed the impulse to glance down again at the cheque. Something was wrong with that cheque. The amount—

He squinted to see, feeling dizzy. A phrase from the letter he was clutching caught his eye.

As he reached for his cup, he felt waves of nausea sweep over him. He couldn't move.

"There's no need to finish your coffee, my sweet," Jenny was saying.

And then she said something that wasn't clear. "I'm ready to take you up, now."

The phrase from the letter was the only clear thing in the room:

"... accept our cheque for \$10,000 as payment in full on Mr. Nearing's policy, and our sincere sympathy on his untimely demise as a result of his fatal fall from his roof last month . . ."

Then there was nothing clear in the room.

—Joseph Slotkin.

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Write, Call, or Telephone

To an alien with a body temperature of 519°C used to a natural environment some 400° higher than ours, this planet would be virtually a death-trap. To expect him to stay long enough to find something would sign his death warrant by freezing. But with help . . . ?

CO-EFFICIENCY ZERO

By FRANCIS G. RAYER

Illustrated by LEWIS

There was no sign of Tirkel's circular ship on the radio screen, and I had not expected there would be. My plan was radio silence and a sharp watch with the directive equipment. Tirkel would be aching to contact his accomplice.

The altitude of the *Hemrod* was still decreasing and her slow rotation gave a changing view of the planet below. I watched from the control-room port, not liking what was revealed. Huge, billowy masses of white vapour hung over the surface at much lower levels. Only once before in my life had I seen their like. It shocked me that the planetary temperature was so low that water vapour should remain in its visible condensed state. Tirkel and Path had been hard pressed indeed to flee to such a planet when I had surprised their twin ships resting on the baked, sunward side of the smaller planet much nearer the system's centre.



Beyond the vapour banks was visible a mottled green. That, too, was bad. It suggested a sub-zero vegetation, thriving in a biting cold so severe that it could instantly solidify the zinc in any of the ship's cabin thermometers. My eyes turned to that above the control panel. The temperature was 100° —one hundred degrees above the zero at which zinc ceased to be liquid. The sight was reassuring. If the ship's inner temperature dropped below 60° that would mean having to wear an insulated suit.

Bare ribbons threading the green spoke of communication ways such as most socialised creatures construct. Objects moved on them rapidly, but whether the creatures themselves, or some form of vehicle, it was impossible to decide from such an extreme altitude. The communi-

cation ways were numerous, mostly terminating at irregular groups of many-hued constructions of varying shapes which demonstrated a liking for the square, rectangular, and perpendicular. The creatures dwelling upon the planet were evidently numerous, but probably only at a low level of civilisation.

A warning oscillation abruptly filled the control room. The stern screen was illuminated and showed three objects moving rapidly in V-shaped formation, closing in. As automatic controls rotated my ship I saw they were artifacts—long, slender, with short wings. I watched a moment, then put the ship into second progression. They dwindled behind and were gone. Evidently the planet-dwellers had atmosphere craft.

Again at high altitude, the *Hemrod* hovered, rotating. At one or two spots upon the extreme low-frequency tuning range of my equipment garbled sounds were audible, but whether they were interplanetary static or some form of primitive radio communication employed by the creatures below could not be decided. Time moved on around me, and eventually came the signal which I knew must arise—Tirkel cautiously calling Path on minimum power. My first directive reading gave a line stretching almost from pole to pole of the world below. The radio screen, set at maximum range, did not reveal Tirkel's ship. It would be necessary to shift position and take another reading to obtain a directional cross.

With the *Hemrod* moving fast under autocontrol, I listened. Tirkel was getting no reply. He was stepping up power and sounded agitated.

"Tirkel calling Path—"

The temptation to flip the send switch and say "*Hemrod* here," was almost too strong. Or, again to try to trick Tirkel by pretending to be Path. If he was agitated he might forget to check on the ship's radio identification overtone . . .

Abruptly as it had begun, his sending halted. Annoyed, I noted the last reading. The directive cross was poor, the points from which readings had been made being too adjacent. That there was no reply from Path might mean he had perished. One propulsion sector of his ship had remained dark when he had so hurriedly left the system's lesser planet and his acceleration had not equalled Tirkel's.

I turned on the sub radio. That was duty. Duty often seemed foolish.

"*Hemrod* here."

There was the usual sub-radio delay—a delay equal in duration whether communication was from planet to planet or across the infinities between galaxies. The reply was just intelligible, a whisper over light-years of ordinary space.

"Headquarters here. You are received."

"*Hemrod* reporting." I was conscious that Tirkel could hear me if he was listening—the fact which made some duties foolish. "Tirkel's ship located on further planet of the system. Path's ship not located."

The delay, then: "Conclude your duty."

That was all. No praise, no blame, no advice. Just a phrase reminding me. And Tirkel knew the extent of my duty also. I pressed the "message received" button and let the sub-radio die. I was on my own.

The *Hemrod* followed the bearing course automatically. Since Tirkel had been outside radio screen range there was no need for an immediate watch for him and I studied the terrain below, pondering on the strangeness of creatures able to exist in temperatures so low that even an element like water vapour could visibly condense. The ship's outer skin temperature was over 300° below zero. Only once before, outside the laboratory, had I witnessed such appalling coldness. It was, I judged, sufficiently frigid for water vapour actually to condense into liquid water. Even at zero, the melting point of zinc, some mechanisms in the ship would begin to fail. At 300° below, the lowest melting-point liquid metal lubricants would freeze, locking the machinery beyond repair.

Remembering duty, I entered a record in the foil log. If I died and the ship could still fly she would return to Pollux under auto control. Meanwhile, the deadly chill outside seemed far off, with the ship's heater keeping the inside at a comfortable 100° above zero. I calculated that if the creatures below used the temperature at which water ceased to be liquid as zero, a comfortable 100° for me would probably be death for them.

The ship swayed and all my attention snapped back to the screens and the streaming passage of time. Tirkel's circular ship was coming up behind me fast; a ray lit. He had come back along the bearing path, surprising me from behind . . .

I lifted the *Hemrod*, twirling, vibration telling me his ray had struck.

"You're a fool, Zero," he said over the radio.

I smiled at that, partly because of the name. It showed that he was not thinking of me as an individual, but as the first member or prime mover of a folk whose enmity he had earned.

"Many a fool is an able instrument to fulfil a simple duty," I pointed out.

"Meaning you don't anticipate much difficulty with me?"

The words showed he had heard the sub-radio directive. Already clear of the planet's atmosphere, I increased speed to a level he dare not use at lower altitude.

"Your trap's failed, Tirkel," I said.

He did not answer, but the screens showed he was no longer following me. Roles reversed, I followed him, confident that he would not leave the planet. Inhospitable as it was, he had travelled too far, and been surprised into flight too often, to waste any chance of replenishing his stores.

A feeler circuit check showed that he had nipped the *Hemrod's* rim. Luck had decreed the damage was in a sector housing half the ship's heating equipment. Damnable, I thought, when planet atmosphere temperatures were 300° to 400° below zero.

I put on a heated suit to inspect the damage at first hand. The two last doors in the corridor had pressure on my side, showing the hull fabric was fractured and I hesitated before opening the last, watching the gauge. I could not afford to loose too much of the ship's oxohelium air.

A glance from beyond the second door showed the damage to be beyond repair. The metal lubricants of the pumps already hung in solid icicles. Shaken, I retreated and fastened the door.

High, I followed Tirkel. This set a limit on time. He was keeping low, too, and the more I descended into the atmosphere the greater would the *Hemrod's* heat loss be.

I checked temperatures and the ship's operation. When my eyes returned to the radio screen Tirkel's ship had gone.

Hovering, the *Hemrod* scanned the area below and around. There was no sign of Tirkel, but the terrain was undulant and largely covered with some high species of the sub-zero vegetation. I calculated from his last seen position and speed, and took the *Hemrod* down, wondering how long my single heater would keep the temperature endurable.

The vegetation cracked and sent up steam as the ship settled. Low growths nearby became brown, black, and sparked into spontaneous combustion. The outer hull thermometers showed that a stiff wind was blowing, its temperature some 350° below zero. Under its influence the flames grew, licking merrily among adjacent clumps of prickly, dry-looking plants. I shivered involuntarily as I slipped into my suit. Without protection, 10° below zero would bring rapid death—and outside it was 350° below.

The earth steamed with every footfall, but the suit temperature should remain sufficiently high while I reconnoitred the area in which Tirkel had probably landed. Sunshine streamed among the high plants, each scores of times my height. Lower vegetation obscured

the view, but thinned ahead. Soon a much greater area was visible. At some distant a low artifact stood—probably a dwelling. Surrounded by many long-stemmed, golden brown plants, it looked insubstantial. Much nearer something was momentarily visible, moving at once from sight, and I went on.

At the top of a slight slope I halted in astonishment. Lower down a stream of liquid moved, and from laboratory experiments I knew it to be water. A small creature clad in a striped garment sat on a stone with feet dangling in the liquid, apparently experiencing enjoyment despite the temperature, which I calculated must be at least 320° below zero, since the liquid gasified at 319° below. Nearby, a bridge of shaped trunks spanned the stream.

The small being rose, seeing me, sunshine glinting in her golden hair. Her eyes grew big. She approached slowly, until only a few paces away, then put up her hands before her face, made an audible vibration, and stepped back.

I hesitated, then turned and hurried away. No useful development could come of any personal contact with the planet's beings, even had such contact not been specifically forbidden, when avoidable. I had not anticipated contact, and had not attempted to prepare myself for it.

Back amid the tall trunks, I searched until the light began to grow dim. Just before deciding to return to the *Hemrod* I found a singed trail through the vegetation, consistent with my own. Tirkel had undoubtedly gone that way, possibly searching for the things he lacked, or substitutes.

Something began to spatter upon the foliage of the plants, hissing as it struck my suit. *Liquid water*, I thought. Horrified, I turned and ran for the *Hemrod*.

The suit temperature was down to 80° when I gained her. The inside of the ship was 95° and light outside had gone. The thought of searching while drops of liquid at 320° below zero fell could not be entertained and I decided the time might be well spent investigating the radio sounds first heard on approaching the planet.

Several bands of signals proved to be audible on the ship's all-purpose local communication equipment. Some carriers held only strange warblings of continuously changing pitch and tone, but others seemed more promising and I plugged in the ship's basic sound analyser. As darkness had come and the downfall was continuing a period of rest seemed indicated. An automatic alarm would tell if Tirkel's ship rose. On second thoughts I assumed the radio was tuned to a powerful, and thus presumably local, transmitter, and clipped the analyser's output pads to my head. If Tirkel stayed grounded search

on foot would be necessary, and knowledge of a few basic symbols of audio-vibration communication could prove valuable if native life-forms were encountered.

I awoke when the light was returning. The *rain*—the word came without effort to my mind—had ceased. I went out, hoping it would not return. A heavy downpour might cool the suit below tolerance level, or quench the *Hemrod* for ever.

I went the same way, determined to follow Tirkel's path. On the rise the golden-haired being stood, totally unafraid. I hesitated, halting ten paces away.

"Why were you afraid last night?" she said.

I turned on the suit's equipment. "You are a little girl?"

"Yes. Susan." She examined me seriously. "You are a fairy-tale man, aren't you?"

No significance came to my mind. I sought a useful word.

"Perhaps."

"Why are you here?"

"To search a companion. Have you seen him?"

She shook her head slowly. "No, only you. Are there other fairy-tale men?"

"Perhaps," I said again.

As she did not know, it was useless to wait. Behind her, noses in the water, were two beasts.

"Have your companions seen him?" I asked.

She laughed, the sound ringing amid the trees. "Silly, cows don't talk——"

I realised I had made an error. It was always so easy, with alien life-forms. "Oh, no?"

"Except in fairy-land," she said. "Mummy says they can there." She hesitated. "What is your name?"

I gave it phonetically: "Zero." On Pollux we do not use audio-vibrations as communication during personal contact.

I left her, anxious to find Tirkel. She ran a little way, came near me, said "Oh, but you're *hot* !" and let me go on, waving once when I looked back.

Tirkel's trail ran amid the trees for a long way, then turned away into gorse. Here, the rain seemed to have been slight and sun and wind had dried the vegetation so that it smoked at my touch. Once, when I halted, little flames began to grow under my feet. In one place Tirkel had apparently tried to gather a low herb which reminded me of our polar hungerweed, but had obviously abandoned his efforts because the plants withered to brown ash at his touch. He must be

desperate for food, I decided. No Polluxian would attempt to make food from an alien plant unless extremely hard pressed. I did not pity Tirkel. Men who kill a brother of an upholder of the law must expect their hunter to feel both personal hate and a strong desire to fulfil his duty.

The trail ended at stones and bare earth and could not be found again. I decided to return to the *Hemrod*. If Tirkel had abandoned his search for supplies he might take off to try elsewhere on the planet.

A read weal ran along the *Hemrod's* side and I knew I had made a bad mistake. Seen from a distance, it had the characteristic form of a hand weapon burn. From near by, the damage was obvious. The outer hull was sliced in several places. Inside, the temperature was already 50° below zero. The zinc in my cabin thermometer was frozen, reminder that such frigidity would never normally be encountered there. The remaining heat generator was cut into neat sections. As if in grim humour Tirkel had left the dial intact. It was already at 80° below, and visibly falling.

A quick examination revealed his two-fold purpose. Half my stores were gone. The amount already taken was astonishing: the remainder had only been left because it could not be carried, as dropped items showed.

The *Hemrod* was cooling—dying. At her exit port were signs that gave me a second shock. In all, three sets of footprints marked the scorched earth—those of myself, and *two* others. *Path*, I thought. Path had not answered Tirkel's call, but had instead listened and watched . . .

I sought for spare suit heating containers, and found none. The pair had taken them. Within two hours, at most, my temperature would have fallen to a level where metabolism ceased. Nor could the cooling *Hemrod* save me from death.

Leaving her, I moved fast. The broken, wooded hills, and adjoining plain formed a large area to search on foot. Tirkel's ship was well hidden, as its disappearance from the radio screen proved.

A quarter of my remaining time had passed when I saw the smoke against the sky that could have indicated where Tirkel's ship had lain. Higher ground gave a view of acres of flames that spread rapidly with all the ferocity of an autumn woodland fire. I guessed the two I sought, or their vessels, were its cause. Low-temperature objects, kindled into spontaneous ignition—

Movement attracted my gaze. Near the wooden dwelling I had seen the day before something white fluttered. In the hands of the girl Susan . . . I wondered why, then realised. Susan had enjoyed

water at 320° below zero; had said I was *hot*. Was, in brief, a low-temperature organism. Fire was high-temperature—could mean death. A rule learned during interplanetary cadetship returned—*No harm shall in any circumstances be caused to any native life-form*. It was of first importance—overshadowing even personal survival, the basis of all inter-galactic peace. Quick, as if following a reflex, I ran for the distant farm.

The fifty yards of leaping flames through which I had to pass were nothing. When I reached the farm house it was surrounded by fire and Susan was cowering with her hands before her face, crying. A boy child was there also, somewhat her senior, and a woman who stared at me with a terror matching her horror of the fire.

"I will carry you to safety," I said.

Boy and woman withdrew from me, but not Susan, who uncovered here eyes. "You're *hot*," she said.

I grew still. I was a comfortable 100° above zero—for creatures living at 320° or more below, that could be death. Part of a programme only half understood had come through the analyser. These creatures called zero the temperature at which water became solid, and 100° the temperature at which it boiled. On that scale, my suit was 419° or my suit and me at 519° .

The woman was sobbing, the boy white-faced. Minutes precious for us all slid past and a tree crashed, throwing sparks. Susan's lips moved:

"*Save us, fairy man—*"

I looked in the house, and around it. The back was smoking. A pipe ran from the roof into a circular metal vessel—an iron tank, large as myself and a third full of water. I thought of Susan, of the stream, and of experiments in the laboratory with simple, low-temperature life-forms.

The tank was heavy. The water threatened to splash me, drawing off my life's heat in steam. Susan understood first. "Oh, yes, yes!" she said.

I carried her through the walls of fire in the tank, tilted it so that she could climb out, and returned to the farm. The boy did not hesitate though his eyes were full of terror and curiosity. I stumbled once, carrying him, and water fell on me, hissing. Only when I reached the hillside did his head appear above the top of the tank.

"Mother," Susan was wailing. "Oh, Bob, make him go back for mother . . ."

The boy did not speak, but the look in their eyes was expressive. I had to rest. The two journeys had taken longer than I had supposed.

"Please — fetch — mother," the boy whispered at last.

I forced myself up. Time was passing, carrying death for me too. And these low-temperature life-forms obviously had a deep love for each other.

The woman hesitated when I appeared out of the smoke. Her eyes were streaming, wild, yet sane.

"*What are you?*" she said.

I thought of explanations, of passing time, of their love. "Susan and Bob are safe and want you," I said simply.

She climbed into the tank and I carried her to the hillside. There, locked in each others' arms, they stared at me. I felt chilled from contact with the tank and its deadly, frigid water. Worse, half my remaining time was gone, and so was the portable weapon I had carried to deal with Tirkel.

"I knew you were kind when I met you before," Susan stated. A smile came to her grimed little face. "Did you come from fairyland to save us . . .?"

Time was short. In saving them I could have lost my chance. "I must go."

She pulled free from her mother, ran towards me, extended a hand, and drew back.

"Why?"

The simplest reply seemed best. "Because two other fairyland men want to kill me."

She looked serious. "Then they are wicked——"

I left the group. Tirkel's ship could have caused the fire. Therefore I must go that way, unarmed because many hours' search among the burning debris to the farm might not reveal my lost weapon. The house itself was already half gone.

The need for heat would soon become imperative, first agonies coming when the highest melting-point fats in my vascular system began to solidify. Many millennia before, death by cold had been a primitive and favourite torture of some Polluxian races.

The smoke was carried among the trees by the frigid wind which so cooled my suit, and it was not always easy to see. Once I halted aghast upon a bank below which ran the stream. A source of pleasure for Susan and her cold-blooded kind, it would be certain death for me. I remembered the bridge and began to follow the bank. The suit temperature was down to 80°. Never before had I felt so cold. A drop of only 80°, and the zinc in the capillary suit thermometer would solidify—but the fact would not be known to me. Death would have come, swiftly and painfully, at about 55°.

I hastened, nearing the bridge. The smoke cleared and out of it, four paces from me, emerged a sleek, shining form at least two feet taller than the highest human I had yet seen—Path. His recognition of me was equally instantaneous and my name danced upon the silvery tympanum of his cheeks.

"Zero!"

My hand went to my weapon belt before its emptiness was remembered. The movement betrayed my loss.

"Defenceless, too," Path said. The suit's transparent headpiece in no way concealed his triumph. "I'm glad I came back!"

I played for time, watching him. "You like a final decision rather than uncertainty?"

"Always." He was watching me too. "As I told Tirkel, I'd prefer to see you die in person—"

Smoke came between us. When it cleared I had gained the end of the bridge.

"You are both under arrest," I said. "To which ship did you take my stores, your own, or Tirkel's? We will return in that—"

He laughed, a rapid vibration of the cheeks. "My ship was wholly destroyed on landing, Zero. And your apparent confidence does not deceive me. Tirkel's ship is so hidden you would never find it in a month—while I doubt if you have hours, even if I let you live, which I shall not . . ."

His eyes moved significantly as if he could indeed see the wind that drew from me heat I could not replace.

"My records at H.Q. contain no failures." I was waiting for the smoke to come again.

"Then they will close with one," Path stated. "But I waste time. It is two hours march to Tirkel's ship."

His hand dropped to his belt. The smoke came again and when it cleared I was nearly over the bridge. As I had ran I had calculated: my suit heat would not last two hours.

Feet flying, I ran on, judged when Path would be on the bridge, turned and raced back. He fired, missed, and I struck him . . . Only then did he realise his danger, seek in terror to maintain his balance—and failed.

His quenching was so instantaneous that it shocked me, his cooling into rigidity so abrupt that one hand remained raised. Steam bubbled, hissed, then was gone. Prone, immovable as one of the stones upon which he lay, Path was still visible through the shimmering crystal of the dead liquid the bridge spanned.

I went to the bank, not daring to touch the water which could draw off heat-supporting life so instantly. Path's weapon had fallen too

and lay near him. From my knowledge of its mechanism I knew that immersion in the liquid for even brief moments would destroy it.

The other thing I coveted—Path's power container—was strapped to his suit. If got out quickly it could still be of some use. I tried to drag it free with a branch, but failed. No other means were available. Touching the surface of the stream with a finger sent cold seeping in. It would be impossible to seize the container with one hand. The temperature drop would freeze my limb into uselessness the moment it was plunged in . . .

I turned from the stream. Two hours march to Tirkel's ship, Path had said. *If one knew where it was.* My heat would not last so long. There was thus one chance only: to return to the old *Hemrod*. She offered no shelter. But Tirkel could have returned for the remaining stores while Path searched me. Tirkel lacked things left there. Want could have sent him back.

A deadly mist, very fine but more cooling than wind alone, had begun when the *Hemrod* came into view. My suit temperature had long dropped well below 70° and my limbs were chill. I ran for the ship's port, sheltering from the falling moisture which made my blood congeal and created a cloak of vapour about me.

In complete silence I moved through the ship. Her temperature was so low that I fancied I could feel the numbing cold even through my suit. She was dead, her temperature drawn off by wind, mist and rain, her mechanisms locked by their frozen lubricants, there to lie until they became part of the dripping forest. Time was passing, too. I looked at the zinc level in the tube of my suit thermometer, and averted my gaze. There was no common basis between myself and the planet upon which I stood. Its very plants and fauna shrank at my approach, shrivelled by my heat. I, in turn, recoiled from the appalling coldness of everything surrounding me. The environment was untouchable, alien—therefore death. Oxohelium to breathe and food to eat I had in plenty. If they had lacked, they could not be found here, as Tirkel had discovered, because the planet was not one for such as we. But of life-giving heat I had almost none. Nor could that simple, basic need be met. The planet was too cold. There was no mutual standpoint of existence, no uniting factor, no coefficient. With coefficient at zero, a being thrown upon his own resources could not hope to maintain himself—

"So Path didn't kill you."

Tirkel stood in the corridor behind me. Tall as Path, strong, silver in his suit, he already held a weapon trained on my chest. Danger, triumph, despair rose in my mind.

"Path?" I said. "Is he here?" Let Tirkel think Path lived—it would increase his feeling of security and triumph. "I thought his ship was damaged leaving Mercury."

"The inner planet? It was," Tirkel was wary. "But he got here, following me. He planned to sit on your tail, in radio silence, but crashed—"

"Then he's dead," I said.

"No." Tirkel obviously believed me ignorant. "The ship was ruined, that's all . . ."

I had hoped that Path might have been deceiving me on that point. A search for two ships had twice the chance of a search for one.

"So your vessel is the last, Tirkel," I murmured.

"The very last."

He was not going to be drawn. His expression showed that. By no hint would he give the slightest indication of where his vessel lay.

"Since Path didn't make sure of you, I will," he said.

I began to retreat. The situation must not remain static. "You know I've never failed on a case, and shall not fail on this one," I pointed out.

There was momentary doubt in his eyes, but it went. "You're alone!" It was a statement—he knew.

Still moving back, I reviewed the situation with half my mind. I must overcome or kill Tirkell, must have his power container to increase and maintain my suit temperature—and must find where his ship lay, promptly. The last point was as essential as the others. To gain it, Tirkel must be made to confess where she lay.

He followed me, and I realised I was in the *Hemrod's* entrance port. Outside was slow death; here, quick death—perhaps.

"H.Q. did not delegate me for this task because it was my brother," I said evenly, "but because it was one they thought I would fulfil."

"They have made mistakes before now." Tirkel seemed to have reached the end of his waiting. The weapon was steady, the digit on its firing stud rigid.

"Your simplest solution is to take me back to your vessel and return to Pollux as my prisoner," I stated.

He laughed and I knew he was going to shoot. I dived for his legs—an impossible chance. Simultaneously something in the trees opposite the port exploded with an abrupt crack and Tirkel collapsed. He landed on his back. There was a hole in his chest and I knew he was dead.

The boy and girl, almost forgotten, ran from the trees. "I told Bob to shoot!" Susan was panting. "He was a bad fairyland man and going to kill you——!"

The boy stood as near as he dared and looked me in the face with adult eyes. "You saved us and mother. You — you're from another world, aren't you?"

Automatically I removed Tirkel's cylinder. "Yes, boy." This meant another few hours life. But Path had said no one could find Tirkel's ship in many times that period. He was not given to exaggeration. My searches had so far revealed nothing, and the deadly mist still fell.

"Which world?" The boy's eyes were shining, now.

"One you wouldn't know." I gestured. "You can have my ship and all in her. It's little enough to give for such an act——"

I strode from the *Hemrod*. The mist hissed on my suit, wasting heat. But to wait was worse. I could only search—search—until I dropped.

Wet grass sizzled under my boots and branches and leaves steamed and fizzed as I brushed against them in my haste. There was no clue. Hope, if I had had any, would have been killed by the absolute confidence of both Tirkel and Path that no one would find the ship unless he knew where to look.

I followed the bank of the stream and wondered which way to go. All directions seemed equally useless, mere woods, hills, undergrowth.

"Fairyland man——" a voiced wailed.

I looked back and saw Sue running, drenched. Every moment could count, yet I waited.

"You saved us," she said.

"I did, Susan."

"Then why are you running away? We would not hurt you."

"I am not running away," I stated. "I am looking for another ship"——

Her eyes grew big. "Another fairyland ship!" The idea seemed to please her. "There is one hidden in the old caves—I saw it come——"

A shock of hope ran through me. "Show me."

"Of course!"

She began to run ahead through the trees. Following, I wondered if there was some mutual basis, even here, for the coefficient which meant survival. Not of temperature, not of food. But of kindness for kindness, help given in return for help received, trust given for trust . . .

"It's a beautiful big fairyland ship," the little girl said over her shoulder. "Bob says the man he shot came from it."

"Forget him," I said. "There aren't many as wicked as he where I come from. He had to die."

Tirkel's ship was loaded with my stores, unharmed, and ready to fly out through the gap in the natural rock formation where he had concealed her . . .

—Francis G. Rayer

Just how alien will Earth appear to the children of the first Martian colonists—Children born and raised in the different environment of the red planet. While the two cultures will basically be the same there will be wide divergences although many things will remain constant.

FIRST TRIP

By SYDNEY J. BOUNDS

Illustrated by LEWIS

The rain was the most wonderful thing Jane Smith had ever seen. She stood in the centre of London and watched it come sluicing down from a grey sky. Never before had she seen so much water; it was a miracle.

The gutters were awash with it, cars splashed through it, lonely pedestrians ran from it. The rain descended in a heavy curtain, opaque, glistening, and wonderful. It came sweeping across the square on a gusty wind. It stung her cheeks, icily wet, and tiny beads of it ran down her waterproof. She stood, quivering with excitement, breathing deeply as if somehow she might soak the miracle into her soul.

A bouncy little tune ran through her head and she was very, very happy.

The rain hammered at the pavements and ricocheted. It swirled muddily into drains with a joyous gurgle. A man ran past her, cursing the weather.



Jane smiled. Her eyes shone. The tune in her head kept time with the rhythm of the rain. Wonderful, wonderful rain! Wind-driven, it attacked the city and put the inhabitants to flight. She held out her hands and let it collect in her palms, trickle between her fingers. It was so wet she felt like making a dance.

"There are quicker methods of committing suicide than standing in the rain, inviting pneumonia," remarked a voice from behind her. "If you are who I think you are, you'd better come in out of the rain and take a hot drink."

Jane turned quickly. He was young, pleasingly handsome, and his eyes and the curve of his lips told her that he had been watching her with amusement.

"I suppose you're right," she admitted.

He took her arm and led her into a café.

"I want a table by the window," Jane said.

"Naturally, you'll want to look at the rain!"

There was a chuckle in his voice but Jane could not take offence. She felt he understood. He took her waterproof and hung it up.

"You're pretty," he said. "The picture I saw on T.V. didn't do you justice."

Jane did not know how to answer. She was eighteen and unused to compliments. Where she came from, men had no time to waste on fancy talk.

"I'm Keith Butler," he volunteered. "And, of course, you're Jane Smith."

She nodded, her attention divided; the rain still poured out of a sullen sky. A waitress took his order: two large cups of coffee, black and sweet. People at other tables were staring at her and, for a moment, she was acutely conscious of her clothes—rough and rude in comparison to the stylized fashions of Earth.

She overheard the bitter comment: "A damned colonist!"

Keith Butler glanced at her. She shrugged; ever since the landing, she had suffered similar remarks.

"Why do so many people here grudge us assistance?" she asked.

"Do they think we want to remain dependent on them? Back home, we work hard—and for long hours—to hasten the day when we will be self-supporting. You, here, have so much, so many luxuries—surely you cannot regret the few things you send us? Things that make life in the colony possible."

He lit a cigarette. Her attention switched from the rain to that simple operation.

"I don't regret it, personally—and I'm sure most thinking people don't. But Earth is largely populated with folk who either can't or won't think. All *they* see is the heavy taxation. The colony on Mars takes a lot of money to maintain, and there doesn't seem any obvious return."

Jane said: "That's stupid."

"Oh, quite—but there it is. A certain section of the public thinks in terms of value received for money expended. Value here and now. To them, Mars is just a bad debt . . . what is it to you?"

"To me?" Jane stared at him, bewildered. Surely, he knew?

"To me," she said, "Mars is *home*."

"Do you like it on Earth?" he asked.

Jane put down her cup.

"In a way, it's exciting. It's my first trip, the first time I've been away from home. There's so much that is different . . . strange and wonderful. And some things I don't like. I'm enjoying it, but I'll be glad to get home."

"Tell me about it."

"Well, there's the rain . . ."

They laughed together.

"Water is scarce on Mars," Jane said. "Do you know what I did, my first night on Earth? I couldn't sleep at all. I spent the night in a hot bath, just soaking in water! It was sheer luxury—something we can't do back home."

"Gravity?" he suggested.

"That was awful at first. I was afraid to move I felt so heavy. But I'm used to it now—we do a lot more physical work on Mars than you seem to here, and I suppose that's hardened my muscles. The only time I feel the extra gravity now is if I climb stairs."

"I don't like all the smoke and dirt you put up with. Under the domes of Mars, the atmosphere is clean even if it is artificial. And I don't like the noise, or the traffic. Or the people who point at me as if I were some sort of freak."

Keith Butler smiled.

"Well, you *are* rather an unusual person—our first visitor from another world? Technically, you're a true Martian, even though your parents did travel there by rocket from Earth."

"I don't look any different than I would if I'd been born here," Jane protested.

"No." He paused, and added. "But you think differently. You are the first human being *not* to regard Earth as your natural home—perhaps that alone makes the colony worthwhile. I don't know."

He finished his coffee and lit another cigarette.

"It's ironic, I suppose, considering that science-fiction writers have used millions of words describing alien beings visiting this planet, to have the first Martian turn out to be an eighteen-year-old girl whose parents were among the first Earth people to go to Mars!"

"I hadn't thought of it like that." Jane studied the pattern of rain hitting the pavement beyond the window. Memories drifted through her head, memories of a childhood spent on Mars. "I'm beginning to realise that I'll never assimilate the attitude of mind of an Earth dweller. There's a gulf . . . you know, mother sometimes slips into the past and talks of Earth as home. That's something I can't do."

"And there will be more like you," he said softly. "Human beings to whom Earth is *alien*."

She inclined her head.

"That's true. I'm the oldest of the children born on Mars, but there are others. Twenty-seven so far, ranging in age from three months to fifteen years."

"And they'll grow up and marry and have children of their own. More people will leave Earth to join the colony. It's a sobering thought, to imagine Mars a hundred years from now. A whole new race, stemming from Earth stock, yet . . . well, not quite of Earth. Interplanetary relations will be something to give the politicians a man-sized headache!"

The rain stopped. The clouds lifted and the sky began to show deep, clear blue patches.

Jane said: "I never quite get used to looking up and not seeing a plastic dome overhead. It's frightening. I have to tell myself that the atmosphere on Earth won't rush into space."

"If you need someone to take you around," Keith Butler said casually, "I'll be delighted to oblige."

For the first time, she gave him her full attention. He had a fresh complexion, frank eyes, and a manner that appealed to her. Young men of her own age were rare on Mars . . .

"I'd like that," she said. "I'm supposed to be here finishing my education, and there's an official programme laid on for me. I feel like giving it a miss and finding out about Earth for myself. But we've talked too much about me—tell me something about yourself."

"I'm one of the misfits," he answered. "An artist."

She regarded him gravely, puzzled.

"That must be nice," she said, "but what do you do for a living?"

He made a face.

"*Et tu, Brute!*"

"That's Shakespeare, isn't it?" Jane asked. "I remember seeing a film about it."

"I'm an artist," Keith Butler said. "I get an existence from cartoons and advertising work. I call it a shocking waste of talent. What I want to do is paint pictures, great pictures—but where are the patrons to buy them?"

"Do you mean you expect to earn your living by painting?"

Jane Smith sounded shocked. He felt he had said he was some kind of criminal.

"Why not?" he countered. "Since the dawn of time, artists have produced things of lasting beauty—not only paintings, but sculpture, pottery, glass-work—oh, and a dozen other art forms. Can you think of anything more worthwhile than producing beauty, giving substance to the moment of vision? Surely that is Man's true inheritance, the

thing that lifts us above the animals? Why shouldn't I expect a living if I can give even one great painting to the world?"

"It sounds convincing," Jane said, "put like that."

He grinned wryly.

"Then you're the only person I have convinced. But seriously, I'd have thought you people on Mars would be more alive to art. Colonizing a new world must surely stimulate the creative urge? Or doesn't it?"

Jane considered his question thoughtfully. It was a point of view that had not occurred to her before.

"We have recorded music and films from earth—I suppose that's the nearest we get to art. Certainly, we've no artists practising, as such. We live too near the existence level for anything like that. Our creative urge, as you call it, is directed into more material channels—producing food, machinery, shelter . . . fighting the planet which denies us life. There isn't any time for creating beauty in its own right. If it exists at all, it will be in the shape of a new plough-share, or an irrigation dam, or the streamlining of a sand tractor."

He nodded.

"I might have guessed, I suppose, but . . . well, with art growing further apart from the people of Earth, I'd hoped for something better on Mars. A new deal for the artist! I'd even thought of emigrating."

"If you did," Jane said briskly, "you'd have to do some *useful* work."

Keith Butler looked at her, a new idea striking him.

"You won't have seen one really first-class painting, not one! That's incredible—something I must change at once. You're going to be submitted to a diet of masterpieces while you're here. It's appalling to think of a whole community growing up on Mars with no knowledge of our great heritage of art. I'm going to open your eyes, show you something worthwhile to take back to Mars."

He smiled, adding: "At least you won't have any preconceived ideas about how a work of art should look!"

He paid for the coffee and brought her waterproof.

"Come on, Jane, it's not far—we'll walk."

Back home, if anyone had taken her for granted in that way, she would have rebelled. With Keith Butler, it seemed somehow natural she should agree to go with him. There was an enthusiasm about him that transmitted itself to her—she found herself wanting to see the things he talked about.

"I think you'd make a good colonist," she told him as they walked across London. "Enthusiasm is the key note on Mars—without it,

we'd soon go under. With us, it's an urge to become self-supporting, to break away from Earth. With you, it's painting and art. I think you'd fit in."

"Perhaps I will join you," he said. "Someone has got to show you colonists what you're missing. Someone has to help the children appreciate beauty for its own sake. Yes, I think perhaps I'll come back with you . . . you've given me a mission in life!"

They were crossing Piccadilly, and there was the shadow of a smile playing round the lips of Eros as he aimed his bow.

Jane and Keith climbed the steps to the National Gallery, holding hands.

"I'm not going to give you a running commentary," he said. "I'll let the pictures speak for themselves."

It was a new experience for Jane. She looked at the paintings lining the walls of room after room, and an excitement grew deep inside her. Some of the subjects meant little to her and she was entirely ignorant of the craft of painting; but, somehow, artists long dead spoke to her, and spoke eloquently.

She moved in a daze, taking in only a fraction of the beauty offered her; the bold designs and masterly colouring of the early primitives; the impasto chiaroscuro of Rembrandt; the *Venus* of Velasquez; the incredible skill of the Dutch school; Turner's experiments in Impressionism; the perfection of Da Vinci's *Madonna*.

When she left the gallery, the streets of London danced before her.

"Keith," she said weakly, "I've got to sit down. My eyes won't work properly and my head's going round. I feel as if I'd been subjected to . . . well, there aren't any words for it."

They sat on a seat overlooking the fountain and he smoked a cigarette while waiting for her to recover.

"It gets you, doesn't it?" he asked after a while. "You can understand now why I want to paint. There's nothing else quite so satisfying."

She turned to look at him, wonder in her gaze.

"Do you paint pictures like those?"

He laughed quietly.

"Not quite! You've been looking at the work of masters . . . I'm just a humble student. No, I don't really believe I'll paint as well as Rembrandt or Velasquez, but that won't stop me trying. You see, Jane, I have a small talent, and I want to develop it as far as I can . . . that's what being an artist means. To go on trying, even when the rest of the world writes you off as a dead loss."

"I can understand that," Jane said; then added: "I'd like to try myself."

"You shall! Come on, we'll take a run-about to my studio—and I'll provide you with paints and paper and leave you to it. I'll bet you can do something good, simply because you've never had any academic dogma rammed down your throat. You'll have a completely fresh vision and I'm excited to see what you do."

It was only a short run to Keith's studio, a large room on the second storey of an old house. There, he set up an easel for her and left her while he prepared a meal. From time to time, he looked in, but she was completely absorbed in her work and did not see him. He smiled as he went back to the kitchen.

Two hours later, Jane laid down her brushes and stepped back to look at her first attempt in painting. She was disappointed—and exhausted.

"I feel like tearing it up," she said.

"A natural feeling," Keith told her. "Don't let it worry you."

He studied what she had done. He saw a Martian landscape, red sand in the foreground, a canal bordered by vegetation in the middle distance, the domes of the colony behind. There was feeling in the way she had handled the scene, a nostalgia.

"Good," he said. "You've got something, Jane—and now, let's eat."

He had prepared a simple meal, but the food was different from what Jane was used to. She ate hungrily.

"That's one of the things I'm going to miss back home," she said. "We're limited in what we can grow and most of our food is synthetic. You should hear the new arrivals grumble about it—now I understand why."

He grinned.

"Trying to put me off?"

"No, Keith—I hope you will come to Mars. You've convinced me that we need artists . . . and I'm going to take some painting material back with me."

They passed an hour looking at his pictures, then he escorted her back to her hotel.

"I'll be coming to Mars with you," he said—and Jane's heart missed a beat as he kissed her good-night.

The weeks passed swiftly.

Mornings they visited art galleries; afternoons were spent in Keith's studio, painting; evenings they went to a concert or the theatre.

Inevitably, they fell in love . . .

"One more week," Jane said with a sigh, "then home. It's going

to look different now. I didn't realise, when I stepped aboard the spaceship, that Earth would change me. There are things I'll regret leaving . . . but most of all I want to get back and show them that Mars needs art."

They were sitting on a bench by the river, watching the play of light on the murky water. The moon was up, and its wavering reflection pointed them out with a silver lance.

He kissed her cheek.

"Jane. Let's get married before we go back."

"I can't, Keith, not without my father's permission. You must wait. It won't be long and I'm sure father will agree to it. Besides, I want you to see Mars before you commit yourself."

"I know I'll love it, with you."

"I believe you will, but we've got to be sure. There's always a percentage of new arrivals who can't stick it. Being a colonist isn't an easy life."

"I'll start an art school there," Keith said enthusiastically. "Encourage the children to develop a new art form, something essentially Martian, as different from Earth as the oriental style is from that of the west. Think what it could mean—a new concept of beauty, alien, yet stemming from roots on Earth. It's something to dream about—we can't possibly imagine what form it will take."

She held his hand, nestling closer.

"We'll start it together, Keith."

"Another week, and then a new life." He was excited. "I can't begin to tell you what this means to me, Jane. It's wonderful, like being reborn. And all thanks to you . . ."

He kissed her again.

He ran on: "I've booked my passage, seen the emigration authorities. Everything's fixed. The only thing I'm waiting for now is the result of my medical—and I don't anticipate any difficulty there."

Jane sighed happily.

"Won't Daddy be surprised when I bring back a husband—and tell him we're going to start an art school! I can just imagine the sensation it will cause. 'You call that useful work?' And I'll tell him there isn't anything more important for Mars!"

"We'll both tell him," Keith said.

It was growing late when they walked back to Jane's hotel.

"Tomorrow, darling?"

"Tomorrow—I hope it rains!"

It did not rain. The sun was hot and the sky brilliant; and the shadow that fell over them took the form of an official communication

from the Medical Board. It requested Keith to report to local emigration headquarters for a chest X-ray.

"I don't suppose it's anything serious," Jane said hopefully. "A routine check-up."

"I've had that already." Keith was worried, but tried not to show it. "Perhaps the first examination was spoilt by a faulty film. I can't think what else it could be—I'm sure there's nothing wrong with my chest."

"Of course there isn't."

He attend the X-ray centre that afternoon. Then followed days of waiting and uncertainty—and anxiety as the time for Jane's departure grew near.

The blow fell on the morning of the day before the Mars-ship left.

"The wall of your left lung," stated the official report, "shows signs of weakness. This is not a serious condition while you remain on Earth, and no treatment is recommended. It does, however, prohibit your settling on Mars, where the wearing of a mask is essential outside the domes and the strain of breathing through a filter would seriously worsen your condition. It is for this reason . . ."

Stamped across Keith Butler's papers was: APPLICATION REJECTED.

"I love you," said Jane Smith miserably.

They walked aimlessly in Regent's Park, conscious of the fleeting hours, the inevitable parting.

"It's not fair," she burst out. "Love should bring happiness, not this awful feeling I have that life is ending for me."

He gripped her arm, forcing a smile.

"Let's sit down, Jane. We've got to talk this out."

"I'll stay with you," she said half-heartedly. "I can't just walk out on you."

He shook his head.

"It wouldn't work, Jane. Mars is your home. If we married and you stayed here, that would always be between us. You'd look up at the sky and I wouldn't be able to face the expression in your eyes as you looked for home. We couldn't be happy that way. In time, you'd come to resent me because I'd kept you away . . . you'd always be conscious of the sacrifice you'd made. And that's no good. You have to go back."

She burst into tears because she knew he was right.

"But I can't bear to be parted from you, Keith!" she wailed.

"We have to be sensible about this, Jane. You've brought a wonderful happiness into my life. It's something I shan't forget—but now

it's over. I can't leave Earth, and you must return to Mars. That's all there is to it."

"I won't leave you," she sobbed. "I won't."

He kissed her tears away and stroked her hair, soothing her.

"Jane, darling, you'll go back to Mars and fall in love with someone else, and marry and have children. That's how life is . . . it goes on no matter how we feel. Sometimes you'll think of me—when you look at a new painting by one of your students—and you'll regret nothing."

"It's important you go back, otherwise the creative impulse on Mars will die from lack of use. You've a job to do, perhaps the most important job there is in developing the Martian colony—make the people conscious of the satisfaction art can give them. It's vital, for without the urge to create beauty for its own sake, men are no more than animals—and, just now, the colony can't see further than material success. It's for you to show the way."

She wiped her eyes, smiling a little.

"You're right, Keith, of course you're right. But that doesn't make it any easier."

It began to rain.

"I hate Earth," Jane Smith said.

It rained all night and continued into the morning. Keith rode to the spaceport with her. Her luggage had already been weighed. Clothes she had bought were discarded, and in their place were paints and brushes, reproductions of old masters and original canvases by Keith. Her papers were checked at reception and they had a few last minutes together.

He held her in his arms and kissed her.

"I'll never forget," she whispered. "I'll never forget my first trip to Earth."

Then she was gone. He had one last glimpse of her through the rain as the run-about carried her across the concrete to the spaceship. Minutes ticked by. He waited. A second hand moved over the face of a clock. Ten . . . nine . . . eight . . .

What was she feeling now, shut away in that metal cylinder?

Seven . . . six . . . five . . .

She would forget him quickly, Keith thought, she was only eighteen. First love, that was all it had been. A moment that passed.

Four . . . three . . . two . . . one . . .

Fire!

It was over. The ship rose on a great gush of flame, the air quivering with noise, rose and vanished into the sky. He turned away, a heaviness in his heart. He swore briefly and headed for the bar.

—Sydney J. Bounds.

This magazine is beginning to become well-known for the number of new authors who make their debut within its pages and then go on to consolidate the respect they have earned with their first story. The following gem needs no further introduction.

D I M P L E

By JOHN KIPPAX

Any time you folks on earth get around to thinking that us guys on Mars base are having a cushy time I will send you a photograph of Master sergeant Miller. His face would not only stop a clock, it would make it shout for mercy too. We of the lower orders, corporals and pfc's and plain sad sacks have thought of lots of things which ought to happen to him, but the programme of extermination don't seem to get under way. My buddy Satchmo, who drives a truck for the service corps says why don't we find a nice big bug-eyed monster and throw him to it? Because, I say, the BEM would throw him right back.

This Miller, you see, is the kind who don't give a guy any rope at all, unless it's to tie him down in the guardhouse. So we who work in the Ordnance Corps depot are properly brassed, what with the restricted mail service and earth blats three months out of date, and Louisa at the PX taking no notice of me, and all the guys generally having to fight for the company of what female soldiery there is against the competition from the big stripes and the little brass.

I do not like the little brass either.

This morning I am up on a charge in front of our section officer, lieutenant Tearhouse, on account of Miller puts me there because I have a dirty pressure suit. This is an important piece of gear what you have to put on as soon as you go outside the big plexiplast domes which cover all camps and important installations: otherwise you would go pop.

Which would be messy.

So Tearhouse he looks at the charge sheet and he says serious very serious pfc Herman J. Herman and what have you got to say for yourself?

Oh sir, I says really pitiful, it was an oversight sir, you see master sergeant Miller told me to clean his number one uniform last night, sir, so I did not have time to do the maintenance on the pressure suit, sir.

Then the lieutenant he stares at Miller and he asks have you been ordering buck privates to do your personal chores for you sergeant? Why you saucy so and so he says, take a week's confinement to quarters and *you*, he snaps at me, take that grin off your face or I will slap you in front of the colonel. Spacemen, he says, I have shot them, shaved them, and shifted them. Take 'em away sergeant major he says.

So we beat it, and I reflect that if this sort of thing goes on then Mrs. Miller's son will not love me at all.

Which will make it mutual.

So I am walking back to the packing bay of our depot, which is where I work, when an orderly room guy looks out and says litegram for you Herman come and sign for it. He says this just at the same time as I am about to say hello to my pal Satchmo who is coming across the parade ground to meet me. So we both go into the orderly room, and the message clerk says sign here buster and I hope you got your brain working this morning he says because this here is in code.

When he says this I think I know what message it is and I am at once fit to bust with laughing.

You can laugh he yips, but we did a check back on that message, it made so like crazy, and that took extra time, so you can fork out three tears of blood for it.

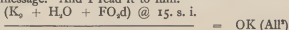
Which wipes the grin right off my kisser.

When we get outside, I show this message to Satchmo, and he tries to read it and then turns it upside down and starts all over again.

I should explain that he is a southern states American whom you would miss completely on a dark night.

Mah goodness, he speaks, you sho know some queer folks Herman.

Satch, I tell him, you are speaking of the aunt I love—she who sent me this message. And I read it to him.



Then Satchmo says man this is not in my department at all will you kindly explain?

So I tell him what it is all about.

This aunt Gertrude of mine, I inform him, is a nice old dear who loves dogs. She also loves me, which is a very nice thing, and to make sure that she goes on loving me, I go on loving her dogs.

I see now, says Satch, the qualities which have gotten you your present state of eminence. You can reason.

Close your wide open space, I tell him, and listen. Now it so happens that aunt Gertrude has a lady dachshund named Dimple, and she does not care to have this dog boarded out while she goes into hospital for a long spell, so she sends the pooch to me, which animal is arriving this morning on the *Silver Star*.

This is what the message say? asks Satchmo, and his eyes show up like dangerkeepclear lights.

So I say it is easy—look. Canine, plus water, plus food (that means rats all alive oh, I daresay), at earth pressure, arriving on the *Silver Star*. OK, all squared.

There is genius in the family says he, but how does this aunt get the pup past the customs on earth? And how does the animal survive?

The hound is in a special box I tell him, with everything necessary to maintain life. The right heating, sun lighting, exercise wheel, and so on. She has influence, and the chief customs man is an old flame who would do anything for her: we would not dream of offending, for when she snuffs it there will be many dollars distributed to her devoteds. If this is all clear Mr. President I say, climb into your suit and I will do ditto and we will get down to the spaceport.

At this point the half hour arrival signal flashes, which means we must scam and quick. So I run back to get my suit and I tear back with it on (this point three eight gravity is useful sometimes), and I get into Satchmo's truck where he sits waiting for me like a cloche-grown black tulip.

I am glad that this is a Service Corps truck because then the picket at the airlock does not mouth about passes and such like he would if I were on my own. Moreover we are going to collect stores from the *Silver Star*, which makes it legitimate.

Then we burble across the old green and brown of the landscape, and it is quite a pleasant morning until you get to thinking and remem-

bering what a morning like this looks like on earth. I am a cheerful natured guy but sometimes the thought of what I am missing gives me the meenies, as do the tales of what they are experimenting with in some areas of the planet. And look at these bug men yarns too: from what I can gather this scare is about on a par with the flying saucer stories they used to have in the nineteen forties and fifties.

So at last we get to the spaceport, Marsport one.

This is a great expanse of sweet Fanny Adams, flat and hard, with buildings around: some are pressurised, some aren't, and they have been talking so long about putting a cover over all the buildings that it has become a joke. Satch and I leave the truck and we join one of the groups of guys waiting, and we gab until the five minute ringer goes, when we all go and squat behind the blast walls and wait. This regulation is as out of date as our colonel, nobody having been fried in a landing for years.

Then we see the *Silver Star* as a speck, and we see her swoosh up above. She reverses nose up and balances down as neat as kiss your hand: I am glad about this because Dimple will not get a shaking.

Then the ship's jets stop sizzling and we stand and we wait until she signals 'motors dead' and then the usual drill follows. They run out supports and gangways, and civilians go down one entry and military personnel down another, stores another and so on. We are routed in with our truck in line with all the others: we have got ourselves a red sticker which means military mail.

So we sit there dawdling up the queue, and I am wondering what shape this hound is going to be in, when Satchmo gives me a dig in the ribs and says hey!

Listen Othello I tell him I have got one set of ribs and they are for a lifetime: what bites?

Then Satch says there is lieutenant Tearhouse in the truck in front. So I stretch my neck and I see that this is so: trust the little brass to take time out for their own private affairs!

We see the truck in front get loaded up, and then we see the lieutenant speak to the unloading gang, and they nod and then the sergeant in charge has men fetch him a big case, all done up and labelled. The little brass seems most pleased about this, and off he goes.

We are next, so I go up and I say is there a large case for pfc Herman J. Herman, Ordnance Depot, Marsport? And the sarge says by heck there is and he gives an order and two guys come struggling along with a box about six feet by four by three. Satchmo and I gape at this, because if it takes two to carry it on Mars it would have taken four or five on earth. I figure my aunt Gertrude is so loaded with influence

that she might even get me my two stripes back: then we would really know who runs the army.

So we check off our load and sign for it, and we scam. My dark friend is very gloomy on the way back, and I do not go at all for the line he gives.

It might occur to you, he says, that having a dog here on this planet might land you in serious trouble.

Satchmo, I reply, do not talk through your ear: I have looked it all up and I don't find any regulations about sending dogs to Mars. Further more kindly do not go at such a bat down this road, or you may shake up Dimple's inside.

Mah goodness, he comes back, to think that you, a regular army man should say such a thing: does it not register that there are no regulations about it simply because no one got around to framing any? You know the army Herman.

It occurs to me that maybe Satchmo is right, so I say OK then, we will not noise it abroad to the brutal and licentious soldiery that we have Dimple. We will park her in a nice quiet corner of the packing bay and we will take her for a stroll when it is dark.

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But no—he starts beefing again, and he goes on like he was bucking for a stripe, until I say listen Satch if you do not want to help say so, but I thought you was a pal of mine.

Then he protests his good intentions and says that he was only trying to think of all the snags, at which I request him to stop before I throw something, as I am quite satisfied with the snags I have thought of myself.

We check in through the air lock and we dump the mail at the orderly room. It is good to breathe again without a helmet. We are about to skive off to sort out Dimple from her air-conditioned prison when I hear a voice which I know only too well. It is master sergeant Miller.

Har, he shouts, that you Herman?

So I tell Satchmo to get off to the packing bay with the big case, and I go to see what Miller wants. Satch leaves so that you cannot see him for dust. It is fortunate that my buddy is in the Service Corps, because Ordnance Corps NCO's do not meddle with them; we all use the same PX here and fights have been known to develop over such infringements. If you can fight on PX beer then you are an enthusiast, and they make second lieutenants of enthusiasts, and then where would you be?

Har Herman, says the sergeant, perhaps you might like to explain what you have been doing out in that truck.

Oh, I say all innocent like, I was just looking after the interests of the unit; I offered to assist private Abraham Grant Washington in the collection of our mail. (That's Satchmo's full monicker—no kidding). If it hadn't been for me, I tell him, you might have had to wait until this evening for that letter from your girl.

True, he says, true.

Anyway, I rib at him, *I ain't* confined to quarters for a week. While he is bringing his brain to bear on that one, I clear. I tear into our hut, stick my suit on the bed, and hare round to the packing bay. There is only one other guy about.

Well, I do not see any sign of Satchmo, and I am just wondering what this long streak of midnight has done with Dimple when I hear a tweeting noise, and I follow it round some big packing case sections stacked in a corner. There is Satchmo squatting down, and looking up at him is one of the cutest dogs I have ever seen. I slide up and I say hallo Dimple and I squat too, and she licks my face and her big brown eyes are as lovely as those of Louisa, who runs the PX.

Which is some compliment.

So then my buddy says man you should take a look at the case she come in. It is a real dog's home says Satchmo such as I never did see. This box has everything he says, it is real cute.

We give this box a cleaning out, not that it needs much at that, and we see that Dimple has something to eat from the cookhouse. We chain her up for the rest of the day, and I take a look at her from time to time, and she is a real lady in her manners and everything. She is a very well brought up dog indeed, though for real good looks I considered that her sponce is a little on the large size.

Then, when it is dark, we pay her a visit and we bring her some food. She is that pleased: she shucks down this food and her tail goes like a rotor blade.

We skive out. We walk slowly, because she has not been able to walk round and have a smell at things for long enough. We amble round the perimeter, and then I find that I am out of cigarettes, so I tell Satchmo to go on slowly and I will catch him up. And I hoof over to the PX. I am not gone more than five minutes, and I find Satchmo again. I cannot rightly say that he has gone pale, but he has certainly gotten as near to it as is possible for any guy with his pigmentation. Moreover his knees are knocking.

S'matter I ask, you seen a ghost?

And he just wags his head at me.

Satchmo I say, speak to me.

I was walking along, he says, when Dimple suddenly slips her lead, and goes off round this big hut here. So I go after her, and then something nips my ankle, and I jump round, and there she is behind me.

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So what, I ask him—this here dog can move fast I guess, even if she does happen to have a low-slung fuselage.

Listen he yaps back, I have not finished: I pats this dog, and then it runs away again: *and I see that it is not Dimple!*

Now see here I begin, but he busts out at me and says listen yourself. I did not major in biology Herman, but I *know* that this dog was not Dimple!

So I reason with him: the light here is very bad I say, and you could not be sure. How did you catch her again?

She walks up to me, he says, *from the opposite direction.*

Then I squats down and asks Dimple about it, and she licks my face and does her little best to tell me.

In a few weeks I have become very attached to Dimple: indeed she is a sight more attractive than some humans I know what walk around wearing three stripes and giving orders. She is still a secret, but with her I am not lonely, for I do not see a lot of Satchmo, as they are hard at it in their depot with the stocking up of this special food pack experimental stuff.

Then one night I go into the PX for a beer and some cigarettes and I see that Louisa is there listening to the same old line from three techs at once and I think how browned can you get?

Well, a little later on Louisa does not have time for listening to even the monied military, for there are such a lot of customers that she mucks in with the serving herself. Then something really happens to make a change. Louisa, who is toting a tray with half a dozen glasses on it suddenly lets out the damndest female screech that ever needed ear-plugs, and slings down the tray. Then she hops on the nearest chair, pulls up her skirt and hollers again. The soldiery are more interested in Louisa's very fine pair of gams than they are in anything else; some cheer, and several guys made rude remarks to those in their line of vision about letting the dog see the rabbit.

Ow! squeals Louisa, I just saw a supermouse!

Where? we ask.

And she says it looked out at me from behind that window curtain.

As she does not show any inclination to exhibit more of her person, most present lose interest, but I go over to the curtain. There is no mouse behind it of course—but there is a hole in the wainscot big enough for a cat to get through—or a dog.

So I creep back to the packing bay, and I am ashamed of my nasty suspicious mind, for Dimple is asleep, quite innocent, and she looks up and she licks my hand. Good dog, I say, and I steal out again, and hit the sack.

The next morning we are getting up and taking our time about it when the orderly corporal, who has shown us his ugly mug once already, comes back and hollers special parade seven thirty overalls web belts and blasters. Then he clears off and shouts the same order to the other huts. So we gaze at one another like stout Cortez did when he first dug the Pacific. Then I say, oh well there is only one thing they cannot do to you in the army and pvt Funk says how do you know for certain?

And I see his point.

I am a bit late and I crowd off for chow, and when I am coming back I think I will just take a look to see if Dimple is alright. But when I look behind the case sections she is not there !

Which makes me go all hot and cold.

And while I am standing there going all hot and cold I suddenly realise that the last call I hear has been the 'fall in,' so I run like smoke and fall in. Without belt or blaster.

Tearhouse and the sergeant major and Miller are there, and I answer my name and I hope that no one is going to notice that I am without b and b. Which hope is so faint that I don't try to pretend that I am somewhere else even. The lieutenant walks along inspecting, and when he gives me the once over he says take this man's name and number and put him on a charge sergeant major such plain ruddy disobedience I will not tolerate.

So it seems that I am for the carpet again.

Then the lieutenant orders stand at ease easy, and he says now pay attention men. We are faced with an emergency he says, and we must take action at once. It seems that there is a form of animal life, of vermin in fact, loose in the camp. None have been actually caught yet, but the patrolling sentry in the Service Corps depot shot at one last night, and he nicked a piece out of it. And he holds up a little piece of brown fur. I go all feeling sick and sorry, and it seems to me that the officer is not feeling very happy about something too, though I cannot imagine what it is. This proves, he goes on, that there are warm blooded creatures in the base that should not be there, and it helps to explain the mystery of the food packs which have been gnawed and broken. This morning they took up a section of flooring in the Service Corps depot, and they found clear signs that these creatures had been nesting underneath.

Me, I feel I could break down and weep. It may be a mystery to him, but it is not one to me. It is clear to me that my little Dimple has been leading a double life, and when I think that she may be crawling about somewhere now, injured . . .

There will be a hunt for these vermin, says the lieutenant. When we

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locate the nests we will burn them out into the open with low charge blasters, working in parties of four. The engineers will be here in a minute to do the necessary dismantling. Speed is essential, because these creatures have been feeding on some food which contains a special colchidine derivative, and this is liable to make them grow at a great rate what the hell are you staring at pfc Herman?

It is no wonder I am staring for while the loot has been doing his spiel I see something move from just round the corner of the block, and it is a brown animal rear end with a whippy tail that wags like a rotor blade.

Then Miller ups with his blaster and something goes pop inside of me, and I just forget where I am and I run forward and knock it up so that it shoots away harmlessly. And then I am amazed to see that Tearhouse helped me to knock up the blaster !

This is Dimple, and the reason she comes round the corner rear foremost is because she is dragging something—a body a bit bigger than herself.

And then lieutenant Tearhouse shouts out Pluto ! Pluto ! he yells.

Then he stops, and any first grader in natural science can see why. For a second later *another* dachshund joins Dimple, and he and she pull and tug at this brown body.

It is a huge rat.

Then Tearhouse runs forward and collects Pluto and I go and grab Dimple, and while he is in his master's arms and she in mine they rub noses and say wuff wasn't it fun !

You have a dog says the officer.

So have you sir, I say, no rules against it as far as I can see sir. (Jeepers I think, I owe Satchmo an apology about this !)

Kept Pluto out of the way because I wasn't sure about the official attitude, he says: very dear pet Herman.

Same here sir I reply.

Seems to me sir, says the sergeant major, that we've got a pretty good rat hunting team here already. And less damage if we use the dogs to scare 'em out sir.

Could they team up and hunt together do you think? asks Tearhouse.

Oh yes sir I says, I am sure they could, always remembering I am on a charge sir.

And he says forget it man, forget it.

Of course, I am enthusiastic.

But I do not tell anybody that the rats causing all this trouble are the descendants of those which escaped from their compartment in Dimple's box.

John Kippax.

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